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A Dungeons & Dragons® Roleplaying Game Supplement

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Going Ape!

A D&D® adventure for characters of levels 5-7

By John Rossomangno

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Adventurers are a rare sight in Jocotopec, but the jungle village serves as an occasional waypoint for travelers heading to distant locales. The villagers maintain a hunter-gatherer lifestyle well suited to their wild surroundings. Yet, in every generation there is a child who feels the call of Cihuatlco, a long-abandoned city lost in the jungle. Most villagers consider the call nothing more than a child's dream. Yet the ruins of Cihuatlco do claim young ones from time to time, though not in the way the simple folk imagine.

"Going Ape!" is a Dungeons & Dragons® adventure for characters of levels 5–7. Everything you need to run the adventure is provided, although it would be helpful to keep a copy of the *Rules Compendium*™ handy.

Adventure Background

The king of ancient Cihuatlco used to sing an unlucky few from their beds with an enchanted tune. Called forth in such a way, they were unable to

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resist him. In addition, the king and his attendants mastered rituals of necromancy that enabled him to leach these vulnerable sleepers' vitality, thereby extending his life span.

The woman who was to be the last queen of Cihuatlco discovered the king's manipulations. With careful cunning, she used slow-acting poison to kill the king, but her triumph was short-lived. Royal advisors saved a sliver of the king's waning life force and bound it inside an amulet. Later, after the queen's treachery was discovered and she was put to death, her crown mysteriously disappeared, likely stolen by a greedy slave.

Because the king outlived all of his offspring, he was the last of his line. Before deciding what to do about a new leader, the king's former attendants interred his body beneath a grand ziggurat that overlooked the rest of the city. Then the contenders for leadership fell to squabbling among themselves, and things soon turned violent. Strife and rebellion left the once-grand city in ruins that would steadily be claimed by the jungle. Some say that Cihuatlco was cursed by the restless spirit of the dead king, and it remains cursed to this day.

The disappearances of children from nearby villages such as Jocotopec are often viewed as tragic accidents. The jungle is filled with dangers, including sinkholes and hungry jaguars. Only the most superstitious villagers attribute the disappearances to the so-called curse of Cihuatlco. Some who are desperate for excitement sometimes claim to hear the king's song in the dead of night, but their assertions are easily dismissed.

Jocotopec and Itztlico

Jocotopec and its nearest neighbor, the village of Itztlico, are hated rivals. The two settlements often claim ownership of one another's food and water supplies, and one spring in particular has changed hands frequently.

Open conflict would devastate both villages, so skirmishes are usually little more than shoving matches leading to wounded pride and grudges that last for generations. Each tribe accuses the other of being the cursed descendants of Cihuatlco. In actuality, both tribes are descended from the city's original inhabitants, but neither one is willing to entertain that notion, and villagers on both sides go nowhere near the supposed location of the ruins.

Yayauhqui, witch doctor of the Itztlico tribe, is an exception. He strove to restore the great civilization of Cihuatlco and harness its power, enabling his people to rule all the tribes of the jungle. He has spent much of his life recently exploring the ancient ruins, treading where even the bravest hunters refused to go. Slowly he began to unravel the necromantic secrets and enchantments used by the last king of Cihuatlco. When the leader of his village commanded him to halt his explorations for fear of rousing the curse, Yayauhqui refused and exiled himself, vowing to return vindicated and elevate the people of Itztlico to greatness.

Yayauhqui and the Queen of Cihuatlco

When Yayauhqui first traveled to the ruined city, he discovered it was inhabited by wild apes that had taken to emulating the city's ancient carvings in a bizarre mimicry of Cihuatlco's rituals and practices. Doing his best to avoid the apes, Yayauhqui explored the quarters of the king's attendants and found the amulet containing the dead king's life force as well as tablets that taught him the secrets of the king's enchanting song. After the witch doctor had mastered the king's song, he used it to lure Cuicatl, the daughter of Jocotopec's chieftain, to the ruins.

When the girl stepped out of the jungle, the wild apes accosted her. Instead of battering her to death as they had several of Yayauhqui's assistants, the apes led her to the king's ziggurat and placed the queen's crown upon her brow, imitating the carvings they had seen. Where they had found the crown is anyone's guess, but it bore a powerful magic—a shred of the last queen's will. Any female who wears the crown believes herself to be the rightful queen of Cihuatlco. In this way, Cuicatl came to regard the apes of Cihuatlco as her new subjects.

While the apes were distracted by their new queen, Yayauhqui sneaked into what he believed was the king's tomb below the ziggurat and placed the amulet on the mummified remains he found there. As he had hoped, the amulet stirred the mummy to wakefulness. Unfortunately for him, Yayauhqui had placed the amulet on the wrong body. The witch doctor assumed that the large and powerful-looking mummy he discovered was that of the king. Only after it proved both uncommunicative and exceedingly hostile did he discover that he had not animated the dead king but his monstrous guardian—a girallon.

Yayauhqui fled the tomb and returned to his studies, hoping to find a way to put the mummified girallon to rest. He sent one of his assistants back to Itztlico for further ritual components and made plans to reenter the tomb once his research drew to a close. Meanwhile, the people of Jocotopec are concerned about the disappearance of the chieftain's daughter. A few believe she has fallen prey to the curse of Cihuatlco, and they need brave heroes to investigate.

Running the Adventure

"Going Ape!" is presented as a series of events linked to individual locations that the characters are likely to visit throughout the course of the adventure. Although clues at each location can guide them along their journey and develop the plot, it's possible that the player characters will

skip locations, approach them in an unexpected order, or even go entirely "off the jungle path." By all means, allow them to explore where they see fit and provide clues when you feel the players have overlooked something vital. By the same token, don't hesitate to expose the characters to the consequences of their actions if, for instance, they make an ill-advised foray into the ziggurat before uncovering at least some of its secrets.

The adventure features four locations: the village of Jocotopec, where the adventurers learn the legends of the jungle and receive the quest to find Cuicatl, the chieftain's missing daughter; the rival village of Itztlico, which has problems of its own; the Gateway Road archway, a waypoint on the route to the lost city and the heroes' first confrontation with territorial apes; and finally the crumbling city of Cihuatlco, where the party must confront a frustrated witch doctor before attempting to free the new queen of the city from her captors/subjects and her sworn protector, the mummified girallon.

PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

"Going Ape!" is inspired by the ancient jungle settings of the Aztec and Mayan cultures, and the adventure adopts their naming conventions. Feel free to swap out these names with others more in keeping with the spirit of your campaign, but if the names suit you, here's a quick guide to pronouncing them and what they mean.

Camaxtli (cah-mah-SHTEE), male given name; no translation

Chimalli (sheh-MAH-lee), "shield"

Cihuatlco (see-hoo-AH-tlee-coh), "maiden's city"

Cuicatl (soo-ee-CAH-tee), "song"

Huitzilin (wit-ZIL-in), "hummingbird"

Ichtaca (EECH-tah-cah), "secret"

Itztlico (EETS-tlee-coh), "place of obsidian" or "place of knives"

Jocotopec (hoh-coh-TOH-pek), village/tribe name; no translation

Macuahuitl (mah-coo-AH-witl), weapon

Yayauhqui (YAH-yah-oo-coo-ee), "black smoking mirror"

Adventure Hooks

The adventure unfolds in the village of Jocotopec, but the adventurers might need to begin their initial quest elsewhere, undertaking a long journey that brings them close to an infrequently visited jungle, with the village being a stopover between more "civilized" lands. Use one of the following hooks to lure the adventurers to Jocotopec.

- **Establishing Trade:** A member of a wealthy trade guild sends the heroes as emissaries to meet with the natives of Jocotopec and see if they're willing to trade exotic goods from the jungle.
- **Gather Rare Ingredients:** A wizard, or possibly a member of the party, needs a rare ritual component or alchemical substance available only in the vicinity of Jocotopec.
- **Desperate Call for Aid:** Years ago, the current chieftain of Jocotopec saved the life of an explorer from another land who was being stalked by a dire jaguar. As a gift, the explorer gave the chieftain a *sending stone*, so that one day the debt might be repaid. The explorer has since returned home, retired to his estate, and become an influential lord. When the chieftain contacts him out of the blue, this lord hires the adventurers to travel to Jocotopec and help the chieftain any way they can.

Treasure

Assign parcels of treasure as you see fit for each encounter, but hold some monetary treasure back to increase the haul within the city of Cihuatlco, emphasizing that it is a treasure-filled ruin. Furthermore, consider altering the appearance of magic items to reflect the setting: a magic greatsword is an unlikely find in the jungle, but an enchanted macuahuitl (a wooden weapon with an obsidian blade) makes for a flavorful addition to any treasure hoard, and it works as a greatsword in terms of rules mechanics. Similarly, wondrous items might take the forms of clay animal totems and feathered or beaded adornments. Even monetary treasure should feel exotic: coins stamped with unfamiliar visages, and unique cuts of gems and settings for jewelry.

Event 1: The Village of Jocotopec

Roleplaying Encounter

The adventure begins when the adventurers reach the village of Jocotopec, located near the edge of the jungle.

To begin the adventure, read:

The thick vegetation to either side of the narrow footpath thins out to make a clearing ahead. The area is a muddy patch of ground where a dozen thatched huts huddle together. Several children shriek and chase a dog while brawny men wearing little more than loincloths eye you stoically while leaning on sheaves of javelins. More men emerge from trails on the other side of the village, carrying freshly killed game over their shoulders. Behind them stands a veritable wall of greenery, thick and dark with so much vegetation as to seem impassable.

The smell of bonfire smoke mingles with the more delectable scent of a spitted boar suspended above a fire pit. The boar is tended by two men dressed in spotted furs and vividly colored feathers. Several women split strange fruits over a stone. After receiving a nod from one of the men attending the boar, one of the women smiles shyly and offers a sweet-smelling wedge of crimson fruit.

The village of Jocotopec is populated by simple hunter-gatherers. The adventurers do not look like rivals from Itztlico, and so they receive a cordial welcome. The villagers understand Common to some extent, but complex communication takes time and involves a great deal of pantomime and gesturing. The chieftain, Camaxtli, is relatively familiar with the language and is capable of handling interactions with a minimum of misunderstandings.

Tailor the village's initial interaction to your group's preferred gaming style and the characters' opening moves in the village. Camaxtli is cautious around unfamiliar people but takes his cues from them for fear of offending what he thinks might be spirits masquerading as people. If the party advances and attempts to engage in conversation or makes any sort of peaceful offering, the chieftain immediately reciprocates with offers of food and drink and prestigious accommodations—the smooth dirt patch in front of the door to his hut. On the other hand, if the party takes an offensive posture (drawing weapons or attempting to encircle the village, for example), Camaxtli takes a more aggressive approach and has his largest warrior challenge a character to a contest of strength or similar competition. A simple skill challenge directed at the character or a nonlethal fight with one contestant yielding when he is bloodied would suffice to show the party's resolve or its worthiness to sit and speak to the tribe.

Camaxtli hopes the party will free Cuicatl, his only daughter, from the curse of Cihuatlco, but initially he asks roundabout questions while fishing for information that will ease his suspicions about the heroes. Once he is certain the characters aren't evil jungle spirits in disguise, Camaxtli reveals that his daughter was lured into the jungle by the curse of Cihuatlco and beseeches the party to break the curse and return her to the village. As a reward, he offers ten opals (worth 500 gp each) and five clay urns containing 200 gp each in unusual currency. He claims that these treasures are relics of the lost city of Cihuatlco. A character who examines the coins can tell that they are of a completely unfamiliar design depicting a feather-crowned human with four arms holding a spear, a shield, a gem, and a scepter.

MAJOR QUEST:
RESCUE THE CHIEFTAIN'S DAUGHTER
If the adventurers return Camaxtli's daughter to Jocotopec alive, they each receive 250 XP. If the daughter is killed but the adventurers return with her body, they receive 50 XP.

Lore

Camaxtli and the other villagers know the following information.

- The once-mighty city of Cihuatlco, somewhere in the jungle to the east, was destroyed by an unknown tragedy after the last king died. Those who pass through the village occasionally report signs of its existence, such as crumbling stone outposts, but no one in the village has ever been that far away from home.
- The "angry ghosts" of Cihuatlco occasionally lure an adolescent away from the tribe, and he or she is never seen or heard from again.
- The chieftain's daughter, Cuicatl, is the first to disappear in many years. She was last seen gathering fruit in a nearby natural orchard.
- Several members of the tribe suggest that Cuicatl might have been abducted by the village of Itztlico as a reprisal for Jocotopec's warriors chasing them from a nearby spring. Although the two villages do bicker over resources, an act of such violence would be quite brazen and certainly unexpected.

Development

From Jocotopec, the characters can easily reach the natural orchard that Cuicatl disappeared from; it's only a short hike from the village. A DC 10 Nature check or Perception check confirms that there are no signs of a struggle or the telltale evidence of a jaguar dragging its prey into the undergrowth. Cuicatl's half-empty basket is left where it fell, because the superstitious villagers are afraid to touch it.

Journey to Itztlico: The chieftain can provide directions to Itztlico but will not accompany the characters to the other village. If the adventurers ask questions about Itztlico, they learn that the rival village is similar to Jocotopec in size and wealth. After Camaxtli relates one or two stories of recent clashes between the villages, the characters should have the idea that the villagers' idea of war is a series of scuffles between scouts. Camaxtli doubts that Itztlico is involved in his daughter's disappearance, but he provides supplies for the characters if they announce their intention to investigate the rival village for signs of his daughter. Because the jungle terrain makes for slow going, it takes two days to reach the village on foot.

If the adventurers travel to Itztlico, proceed with Event 2.

Next Stop Cihuatlco: Finding the cursed city is challenging, since the Jocotopec natives have no knowledge of its precise location. If the adventurers express interest in finding the ruined city, a young scout named Ichtaca approaches a party member in private. Months ago, while exploring the deeper jungle, he stumbled upon the remains of a road leading to a giant stone archway. Although he is among the youngest of the scouts and far from being granted the title of warrior by the chieftain, Ichtaca is willing to guide the party and lead them to the archway. Camaxtli offers to provide the party with supplies for the trip, but he instructs Ichtaca to return only with glory, or else the curse of Cihuatlco will cling to him and he will not be permitted to rejoin the tribe. Taking on Ichtaca as a guide expedites the journey to the ruins of Gateway Road, but it's still an arduous three days of walking through the jungle.

If the adventurers follow Ichtaca's lead, continue with Event 3.

Ichtaca has the same statistics as a jungle native warrior (page 7).

MINOR QUEST: GLORY FOR ICHTACA
If the characters allow Ichtaca to accompany them and he returns to Jocotopec having survived one or more combat encounters, award each character 50 XP.

Event 2: The Village of Itztlico

Roleplaying Encounter

A footpath through the jungle leads from Jocotopec to a water spring, and another trail leads from the spring to the rival village of Itztlico.

When the party arrives at the village, read:
The village of Itztlico bears a striking similarity to Jocotopec. Thatched huts and fire pits are arranged throughout a small clearing. Children peer at you warily from doorways before being shooed inside by their mothers. Dogs howl and bark upon seeing you, and men daubed with red and yellow paint grow still at your approach.

Several trails similar to the one you have followed spread out into the jungle in different directions, one leading up a small rise where a hut has collapsed from disuse. From one of the trails emerges a group of nearly a dozen men led by a heavily painted figure who is undoubtedly the village chieftain. With a snap of his fingers, the dogs go silent and flee with their tails between their legs. His accent is thick, but his words are unmistakable. "What curses do you bring from the jungle?"

Since their witch doctor Yayauhqui left under self-imposed exile over a year ago, the natives of Itztlico have been living under the shadow of a curse they expect to befall them in return for the witch doctor's meddling with the spirits of Cihuatlco. Difficult hunts and frequent altercations with the natives of Jocotopec have put the natives on edge. The arrival of strangers troubles Chimalli, Itztlico's chieftain. He treats them with extreme suspicion, especially if the party claims to have come from Jocotopec.

Winning over the chieftain requires delicate diplomacy and possibly gifts of food or weapons (preferably metal ones). Chimalli will be more open to the characters if they make it known they intend to break the curse of Cihuatlco. The people of Itztlico vehemently deny any involvement in the abduction of Camaxtli's daughter, and although they are angered by the loss of a nearby spring to Jocotopec, they insist they always "battle properly and not steal women away like spirits." Negotiating a settlement over the spring or providing an alternate source of water for Itztlico would certainly win favor with the chieftain. The villagers will be offended if the characters begin searching their village for signs of the missing girl but grudgingly allow it so that the characters will leave them in peace as soon as possible. Any such search yields no sign of Cuicatl.

MINOR QUEST: WATER FOR ITZTLICO
If the characters provide a water source for the people of Itztlico, they each gain 50 XP. This quest can be achieved by brokering a truce with Jocotopec so that both tribes can use the spring situated between them. The characters can also locate a new water source (perhaps through a skill challenge) or make the Grand Pool at Cihuatlco a safe place to visit.

If Chimalli is coaxed into speaking openly with the party, or if the characters force his surrender (see "Restless Natives" below), he and his villagers are willing to share the following information.

- The people of Itztlico blame their recent misfortunes on their witch doctor, Yayauhqui, who became obsessed with seeking the lost city of Cihuatlco.
- After Chimalli told the witch doctor to halt his efforts, Yayauhqui exiled himself and took with him a handful of young warriors who believed in his rhetoric. Yayauhqui seemed convinced that he could make Itztlico into as grand a place as Cihuatlco, once the city's secrets were revealed.
- Yayauhqui's hut has been left abandoned since his departure. Chimalli permits the characters to search it if they ask but forbids them from bringing any of the witch doctor's possessions into the village. For more, see "Yayauhqui's Hut" below.
- Before he was instructed to give up the search for Cihuatlco, the witch doctor spoke of a crumbling archway that he believed represented the outskirts of the city. The villagers know the whereabouts of this archway and can describe the route leading to it, but they refuse to accompany the party anywhere near it.

Restless Natives

The party's arrival in the village of Itztlico could easily breed violence. Having been recently defeated in "battle" by the warriors of Jocotopec over control of the spring that both tribes covet and living continuously on edge due to their superstitious nature and their lack of a witch doctor, the warriors of Itztlico are easily provoked into attacking strangers. In particular, if Ichtaca or another resident of Jocotopec accompanies the party, the people of Iztlico will naturally assume the adventurers are "spirit warriors" called forth by their rivals to slay them.

The warriors of Itztlico fight according to their traditional ways in the war with Jocotopec and expect the characters to do the same. When bloodied, a warrior withdraws from battle to the sidelines and lowers his weapons; all attacks against minions are glancing blows that either render them unconscious or cause them to draw back as described above. When all of his warriors are bloodied or removed from battle, Chimalli calls for a truce and concedes to any reasonable demands made by the characters.

If the characters press the attack against bloodied foes, the entire village enters the fray, convinced that the party has come from Jocotopec to slaughter them. Depending on your group's style of play, the encounter can take a terrible and tragic turn as the elderly and children enter the fray or a dramatic turn as the villagers throw themselves upon the mercy of the characters, cowering and sobbing before them.

Jungle Chieftain **Level 7 Soldier (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 300

HP 83; **Bloodied** 41 **Initiative** +8
AC 23, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 19 **Perception** +4
Speed 6

Traits

☼ **Stern Presence** ✦ **Aura 5**
Any ally within the aura gains a +2 bonus to defenses.

Standard Actions

⨁ **Macuahuitl** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 10 damage.
Effect: The target is marked until the end of the chieftain's next turn.

➢ **Poisonous Dart** (poison, weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +10 vs. Fortitude
Hit: The target is weakened (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target falls unconscious (save ends).

Triggered Actions

Exhort Violence ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An ally the chieftain can see is reduced to 0 hit points.
Effect (Immediate Reaction): One ally within 5 squares of the chieftain can, as a free action, shift up to 3 squares and make a basic attack.

Skills Athletics +11, Endurance +12, Intimidate +11

Str 16 (+6)	**Dex** 16 (+6)	**Wis** 13 (+4)
Con 19 (+7)	**Int** 11 (+3)	**Cha** 16 (+6)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment macuahuitl, blowgun with 5 poisoned darts

Yayauhqui's Hut

The witch doctor's former residence has fallen into a state of extreme disrepair. Walls sag inward, and large sections of the roof have collapsed. Still, many of Yayauhqui's possessions remain behind, a testament to his belief that he would be successful and someday return to his village. Many clay jars and covered bowls can be discovered containing various spell components particular to this region. The components are worth 250 gp. If the characters take them, they can be useful in Event 6 (see "Performing Yayauhqui's Ritual").

Jungle Native Warrior **Level 4 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 175

HP 55; **Bloodied** 27 **Initiative** +6
AC 18, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 15 **Perception** +2
Speed 6

Standard Actions

⨁ **Macuahuitl** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 7 damage.

⸸ **War Dance** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The warrior can shift 1 square before making the attack.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 7 damage, and the warrior can shift 1 square.

➢ **Javelin** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 9 damage.

Skills Athletics +11, Endurance +9, Stealth +10

Str 17 (+5)	**Dex** 17 (+5)	**Wis** 11 (+2)
Con 15 (+4)	**Int** 9 (+1)	**Cha** 12 (+3)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment macuahuitl, 3 javelins

In addition to reagents, Yayauhqui's hut contains three fragments of stone carvings that show evidence of having been chiseled from a wall. One depicts a sprawling city surrounding a ziggurat, with a carved archway standing at the head of a road leading into the city. Another portrays a champion with four arms battling a horde of foes. The final one depicts an extravagantly garbed man placing a crown on a woman's head before an admiring throng. Also scattered in the hut is a handful of coins (10 gp total) of similar mintage to those described in Event 1.

Development

The "crumbling archway" spoken of by the natives of Itztlico marks the beginning of the road into Cihuatlco, the same one depicted in one of the carvings found in Yayauhqui's hut. The archway is approximately two days' travel from Itztlico through extremely dense jungle. The villagers are concerned about the characters rousing the ire of evil spirits and

Jungle Native Villager **Level 3 Minion Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 38

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +1
AC 17, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 15 **Perception** +1
Speed 6

Standard Actions

⨁ **Club** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. AC
Hit: 5 damage.

➢ **Hurl Net** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 5 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).

Str 11 (+1)	**Dex** 11 (+1)	**Wis** 10 (+1)
Con 14 (+3)	**Int** 8 (+0)	**Cha** 11 (+1)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment club, 2 nets

encourage them not to return to their village for fear of bringing the curse of Cihuatlco with them. Because they do not currently have control of the spring that provides them with fresh water, the Itztlico natives are unwilling to give supplies to the party unless they're threatened with physical violence.

If the party returns to Jocotopec to report its findings, those villagers are relieved that it was not the people of Itztlico who abducted Cuicatl. They will also be forgiving of the Itztlico tribe once they are informed that Cuicatl's disappearance is somehow linked to Itztlico's witch doctor, who acted against the proclamation of his chieftain. If the characters have had good dealings with Jocotopec's chieftain, Camaxtli is willing to hear any reasonable proposal they might make regarding the spring that has been a source of conflict between the two tribes.

Event 3: The Gateway Arch

Combat Encounter Level 6 (1,275 XP)

The long-ago king of Cihuatlco ordered the construction of a stone road leading from the city and out into the jungle, presumably to allow access to surrounding villages. At the head of this road, a massive arch was built to announce the greatness of the city. The crumbling archway is revered by the apes that have taken over portions of the city. They watch from the trees and fly into a territorial rage when the characters trespass upon this "holy" site.

Perception DC 15: The character spots the nearest ape hiding in a tree.

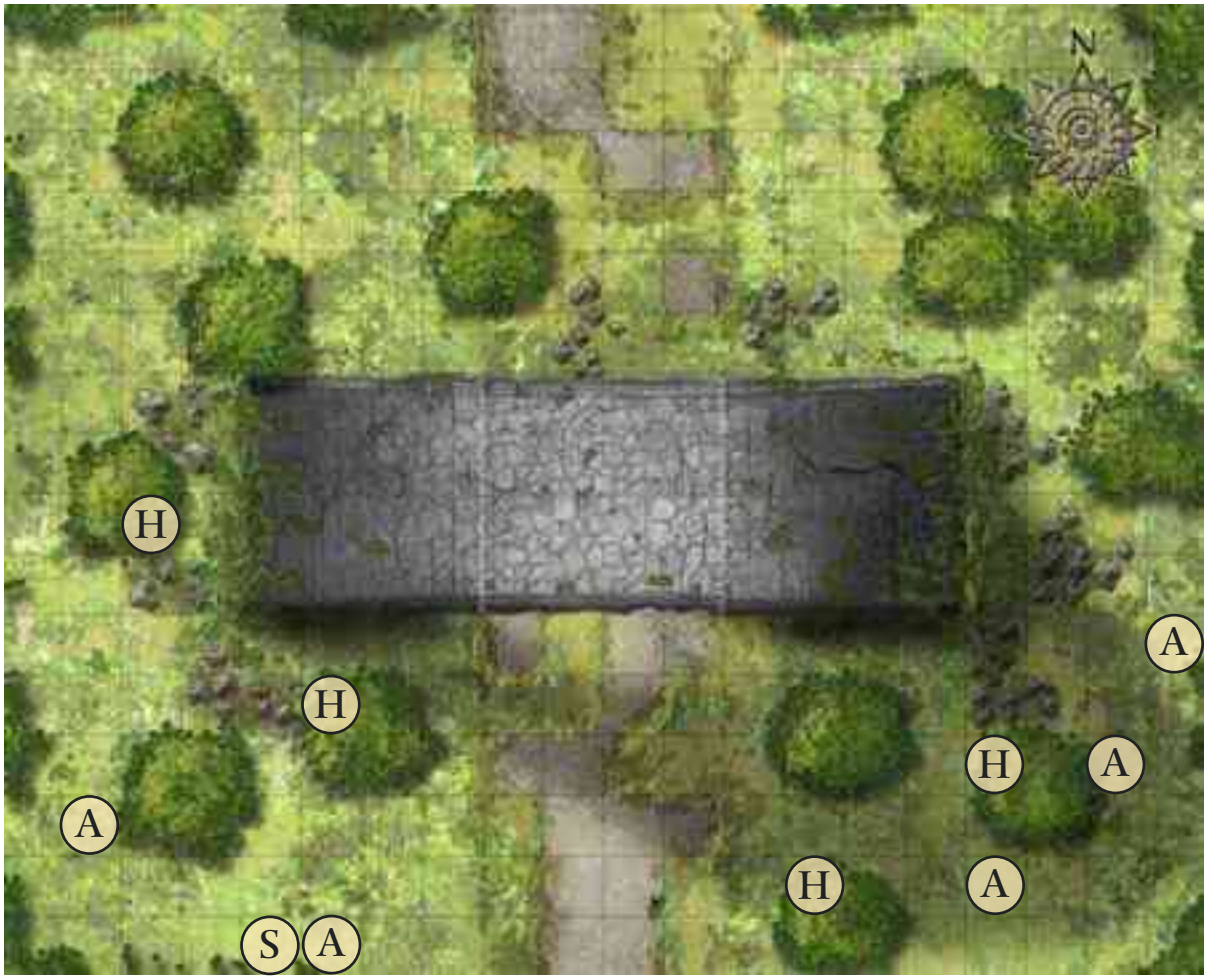
Light: Bright light during the day, dim light at night.

Monsters: 1 silverback ape (S), 5 great apes (A), 4 ape harriers (H).

When the characters arrive at the archway, read:
The jungle foliage parts to reveal a great stone barrier that looms before you like a cliff. In fact, it's a giant archway that has been all but swallowed by the jungle. Decorative but worn faces are carved into its surface, and the 10-foot-high tunnel beneath it is strewn with immense flagstones that have heaved up from the ground by the unstoppable force of the jungle as it tries to reclaim the ruin one stone at a time.

Beneath flakes of lichen and carpets of moss, you can make out bas-relief carvings of ranks of soldiers, legions of dancing women, and a recurring kingly visage.

If the characters haven't detected the apes and approach the archway, add:
As you draw near, angry screams erupt from the jungle all around you.



Searching the ape corpses after combat will yield little treasure, but the apes have donned crude imitations of armbands and bracelets as well as smeared body paint similar to that of the men depicted in the carvings among the ruins.

Archway: The 50-foot-tall crumbling stone archway extends well up into the jungle canopy and straddles the beginning of an almost completely overgrown road of flat stones that disappears into the jungle. The arch can be climbed with a DC 20 Athletics check.

Many of the archway's bas-relief carvings are intact, although in places vegetation must be pulled away or the moss scratched at to reveal what's beneath. The carvings testify to the majesty of Cihuatlco and the people who built the city. They depict men rolling immense stone blocks across logs while larger, stylized four-armed men cleave through

Silverback Ape (S)	Level 5 Brute (Leader)
Medium natural beast	XP 200
HP 75; **Bloodied** 37	**Initiative** +3
AC 17, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 17	**Perception** +4
Speed 6, climb 4	Low-light vision
Traits	
Swift Climber	
The ape does not provoke opportunity attacks by climbing.	
Standard Actions	
Slam ✦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d10 + 5 damage, and the target grants combat advantage until the end of the ape's next turn.	
Fling ✦ Recharge ⚅	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 3d10 + 8 damage, the ape slides the target up to 3 squares, and the target falls prone.	
Minor Actions	
Chest Beat ✦ Encounter	
Effect: Each beast ally within 5 squares of the ape gains a +2 power bonus to attack rolls until the end of the ape's next turn.	
Skills Athletics +12, Intimidate +6	
Str 20 (+7) **Dex** 13 (+3) **Wis** 15 (+4)	
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 2 (-2) **Cha** 8 (+1)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

5 Great Apes (A)	Level 4 Skirmisher
Medium natural beast	XP 175 each
HP 55; **Bloodied** 27	**Initiative** +6
AC 18, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 16	**Perception** +4
Speed 7, climb 6	Low-light vision
Traits	
Swift Climber	
The ape does not provoke opportunity attacks by climbing.	
Standard Actions	
Slam ✦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage.	
On the Run ✦ At-Will	
Effect: The ape shifts or climbs half its speed and uses *slam* at any point during the move.	
Felling Blow ✦ Recharge ⚅	
Effect: The ape uses *slam* twice against the same target. If both attacks hit, the target falls prone.	
Skills Athletics +11	
Str 19 (+6) **Dex** 15 (+4) **Wis** 14 (+4)	
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 2 (-2) **Cha** 8 (+1)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

4 Ape Harriers (H)	Level 5 Minion Artillery
Medium natural beast	XP 50 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +4
AC 19, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 16	**Perception** +3
Speed 8, climb 6	Low-light vision
Traits	
Swift Climber	
The ape does not provoke opportunity attacks by climbing.	
Standard Actions	
Slam ✦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 6 damage.	
Hurl Coconut (weapon) **✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +12 vs. AC	
Hit: 6 damage.	
Triggered Actions	
Scurry ✦ At-Will	
Trigger: The ape harrier is missed by a melee attack.	
Effect (Immediate Reaction): The ape harrier shifts or climbs up to half its speed and uses *hurl coconut*.	
Skills Acrobatics +9, Athletics +9	
Str 15 (+4) **Dex** 15 (+4) **Wis** 13 (+3)	
Con 12 (+3) **Int** 2 (-2) **Cha** 8 (+1)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	
Equipment 2 coconuts	

the jungle to make a path ahead of them. Above these depictions are carvings of a face that is clearly a chieftain or a king shown in great detail. He is often depicted crowning his queen but at other times is shown standing outside villages calling or singing toward them. Careful observers will note that the king's face is consistent throughout the carvings.

Huitzilin: Huddled behind a couple of large uprooted stones is Huitzilin, a cowering native of the Itztlico tribe who has been badly mauled by the apes, escaping their wrath only by feigning death. He is one of the warriors who accompanied Yayauhqui into exile and was in the act of returning to the village because the witch doctor needed further components to complete his most recent ritual. He explains that the apes have become extremely territorial about Cihuatlco and the scattering of ruins that surround it, and it was just such a group that ambushed him.

Huitzilin can provide a basic description of the major features of the lost city, but he and his fellow warriors were typically tasked with looking out for apes while Yayauhqui performed his rituals and searched building after building. The warrior is unaware of just what the witch doctor has been up to and is heartened if the characters reveal that they have been to Itztlico. He is overjoyed if they say they have the witch doctor's ritual components with them. If the characters are friendly or intimidating, Huitzilin confesses that the witch doctor once claimed to have woken the king of Cihuatlco but then plunged into an angry depression at making "a foolish mistake." Huitzilin believes that the ritual materials are needed to address the mistake.

If the characters didn't take the components from Yayauhqui's hut, or if they didn't even visit Itztlico, you can change the circumstances here so that Huitzilin has already retrieved the components and is encountered when he's on his way back to the witch doctor. Everything he explains about the components is still true.

Huitzilin is willing to lead the adventurers to Cihuatlco, but he doesn't trust them if they are accompanied by anyone from Jocotopec. On the other hand, if they indicate that they intend to stop the witch doctor or claim to be there on behalf of his rivals' village, Huitzilin will boast of Yayauhqui's power and claim that the witch doctor has begun to commune with the spirit of Cihuatlco's king. He goads the heroes to "Follow the broken road to the city if you dare!" and accompanies them if requested to do so.

Use the jungle native warrior statistics (page 7) for Huitzilin. He begins the encounter with 15 hit points.

Rubble: The crumbling archway has piles of debris around it. The rubble is difficult terrain.

Trees: Climbing a tree can be accomplished with a DC 15 Athletics check. Characters can also use Athletics or Acrobatics checks to jump from tree to tree (DC 23). The trees marked on the map are 40 feet tall. The trees also grow coconuts. As a minor action, a creature can pick a coconut from the top of a tree, or off the ground at the base of a tree.

Tactics: Any element of surprise on the part of the apes is lost when they begin their wild shouts. The harriers leap between the trees and pelt the party with coconuts while the great apes combine their climb speed with *on the run* to stay out of reach of melee characters. The silverback ape engages the nearest enemy in melee and pursues characters who attempt to scale trees or flee. If the party takes cover in the tunnel beneath the archway, the apes try to block the exits and close in for the kill.

Development

The road leading from the archway to Cihuatlco is difficult to follow. At times, it seems to disappear altogether, its stones having been swallowed by the jungle long ago. Having Huitzilin with them eases the journey for the characters considerably, cutting the four-day trek in half. Following the apes' tracks back to Cihuatlco is impossible because they prefer to move through the boughs of trees.

If Ichtaca is with the party and has been treated well, he is willing to accompany the adventurers to the lost city, taking courage from their own willingness to forge ahead. He is distrustful of "the witch doctor's errand boy" and watches Huitzilin closely.

Event 4: The Ruins of Cihuatlco

Combat Encounter Level 6 (1,225 XP)

The fallen city of Cihuatlco is a sprawling collection of ruins spread throughout an overgrown valley. Although the place has numerous buildings and districts that would be expected in a city, the jungle has seen to it that their original purpose has been lost to time. Entire streets and neighborhoods have been erased by the vigorous growth of foliage.

As the heroes make their way toward the towering ziggurat at the heart of the city, they uncover various other areas of interest and come face to face with Yayauhqui the witch doctor.

Light: Bright light during the day, dim light at night.

Monsters: Yayauhqui the witch doctor (Y), 3 exiled tribal warriors (W), exiled tribal hunter (H).

When the party reaches the edge of Cihuatlco, read:

You spy wedges of blue sky ahead through the canopy of greenery, an unfamiliar sight after so many hours trudging through the jungle. After hacking through thick vines in your path, you reach the crest of a ridge overlooking a long valley. Gray-white shapes of crumbling stone buildings, hundreds of them, poke through the growth in the valley.

Some of the largest buildings appear to be at least partly intact, and gleaming reflections suggest a body of water or a reservoir tucked beneath the trees on the opposite side of the sprawling ruins. Your eye cannot help but be drawn to the immense ziggurat at the far end of the valley. Despite the fully grown trees surrounding it and the vines climbing toward its peak, the awe-inspiring construction remains undiminished.

At this point, the party can descend into the valley and begin exploring the ruins of Cihuatlco. Many buildings, originally constructed of wood, are now nothing but stone foundations. Larger structures stand in various states of neglect, with some almost entirely whole and others reduced to piles of rubble. Like the buildings, tools and other relics show varying degrees of wear; wooden objects have long since rotted away, but many clay pots and vases survive intact or partially so. Occasionally a random metal object of small value (a coin, a small knife or chisel, or a fragment of jewelry) might be located, but overall it looks as though when the former inhabitants of the city fled, they took much of their wealth with them.

Unless the characters uncover a morgue or a burial plot, there are no skeletons lying about or signs of battle. In the end, as the deceased king's advisors and attendants vied for power over the city and its people, they slowly lost control. Most of the city's denizens fled into the jungle, founding small villages such as Itztlico and Jocotopec. Others fell prey to the dangers of the jungle and were never heard from again.

Apes of the surrounding jungle came to shelter among the ruins and over time emulated the activities in some of the carvings they saw throughout the city. The apes have also taken to adorning themselves with primitive jewelry and feathers. Extremely territorial, they are always alert for signs of disturbances around their home. The apes regularly move throughout the ruined city, and careless or noisy adventurers might draw their attention and ire. In fact, the apes are one of the main forces slowing the pace of Yayauhqui's research efforts.

The areas of the city most relevant to the adventure are described below. You can place some of the clues of the history of the lost city as well as signs of Yayauhqui's explorations in areas other than those described here.

The Water Reservoir

When the city was built, a sizable water supply beyond the various springs and small streams in the vicinity was required. An enormous basin was dug and lined with stones to hold the barrels gathered by a continuous march of water carriers from the jungle while also collecting the torrential rainfalls of the wet season. Although the basins are no longer maintained and filled by the king's water-bearers, rainwater still pools here. The reservoir has ample water for the small villages of Itztlico and Jocotopec, but the villagers won't approach the city until the curse of Cihuatlco is ended.

When the party nears the reservoir, read:

Surrounded by thick walls of vines and draping moss, a great stone basin stretches off into the distance. Though the surface of the water rests in stillness close to 5 feet below the lip of the reservoir, there is certainly some depth to the liquid, likely the result of collected rainwater.

A number of columns flanking the pool have remained upright and possibly once supported a wooden roof. Carvings on many columns depict the same royal figure that you have seen in other locations. Here he is shown calling forth rain from the sky to fill the pool and is surrounded by jubilant subjects. Often he is joined by his royal consort, but the queen's appearance changes from one column to the next, though in each she wears the same crown.

Closer inspection of the carvings reveals a fairly large and intact bas-relief of the king being presented with four massive buckets by a four-armed ape. A DC 15 Nature check reveals that the creature is a girallon, and a DC 15 Insight check or History check makes it clear that the creature is subservient to the king and represents a champion of some kind. This champion appears in other carvings as the characters move throughout the city.

The water is slightly murky, but a DC 15 Nature check reveals that the water is safe to consume if it is boiled over a campfire for a time. Though no predators currently lurk near the pool, apes frequent this location and use the reservoir for drinking and bathing. If the characters linger too long in the area, they might encounter a group of them.

The Halls of Wisdom

Yayauhqui the witch doctor lairs in this collection of ruined buildings that once served as a library for the king's advisors.

The king's advisors included many powerful shamans, priests, and wizards, all of them responsible for the creation of his life-prolonging ritual as well as overseeing the construction of the ziggurat within which the king's earthly remains are entombed. These same servants grew careless with their power and brought about the fall of Cihuatlco. Before then, they had amassed considerable knowledge that they housed in the Halls of Wisdom. Although the structure remains fairly intact, the chaos and infighting that erupted in the final days of Cihuatlco scattered or destroyed much of the building's storehouse of information.

Yayauhqui's theories about Cihuatlco came from his painstaking efforts at translation and countless hours studying the carvings here and throughout the city. His difficulties were compounded by the presence of the apes, and only a handful of the warriors who accompanied him into exile survive. The witch doctor has grown more frustrated over time, and his remaining warriors give him a wide berth. Consequently, they know very little about what the witch doctor is up to. Instead they stick to the perimeter of the Halls of Wisdom, watching for apes or any strangers who might interrupt Yayauhqui's work.

As the adventurers approach the Halls of Wisdom, read:

Other than the looming ziggurat that is always apparent above the jungle trees, this structure is the largest and most intact ruin you have come upon. Although the ever-advancing jungle has not been kind, many of the now-familiar carvings are cleared of moss and lichen. More images of the city's former ruler are repeated here but, in addition to various depictions of his consort, he is often accompanied by various well-appointed and highly decorated servants.

The familiar earthy and lush smells of the jungle give way to a smoky aroma. Standing guard around the structure are native warriors with painted skin. The distant grunts and howls of apes make them visibly nervous.

The characters can approach in a variety of ways other than an all-out assault, perhaps attempting a Bluff check to get past Yayauhqui's guards or using Stealth to gain entry. If Huitzilin (see Event 3) accompanies them, he could be of great assistance, especially if the characters are carrying the ritual components from the witch doctor's hut back in Itztlico. If that is the case, they will be granted an audience with the witch doctor, under guard of course.

If Huitzilin is in possession of the components because the characters didn't pick them up, the scene unfolds in much the same fashion: Huitzilin brings the heroes into the Halls of Wisdom and allows them to look around while they await Yayauhqui's arrival. The witch doctor shows up at whatever point you deem appropriate.

Upon entering the ruined building, the characters might be disappointed initially if they were expecting a library of books and sheaves of scrolls. By now it should be apparent that the people of Cihuatlco expected their city and their works to endure, and the carvings on the walls throughout the building are their records. Other records are carved on

pieces of large stone tablets that have been gathered and assembled by Yayauhqui's assistants under his guidance.

The tablets tell the story that the witch doctor has managed to discover. They depict the crafting of an amulet for Cihuatlco's king alongside images of a crown. Others show the king performing an enchanting song ritual designed to make the crown's wearer obey his wishes. The carvings testify to the king's unnaturally long life span, and clever players might deduce that the amulet and the crown were crafted as a means to extend the king's life.

Yayauhqui worked out the ritual needed to lure the young to the city as well as identifying the powers of the amulet and crown. Although he located the amulet, he was unable to find the crown until he called his first victim from the jungle and the apes ceremoniously placed the crown on Cuicatl's head. Cuicatl's arrival provided enough of a distraction that the witch doctor was able to sneak into the ziggurat and place the amulet upon the mummy of the king, thinking it would restore the king to life (whereupon Yayauhqui would be rewarded and elevated to the position of the king's first new advisor). When he mistook the king's girallon champion for the king and placed the amulet on the wrong body, the result was a mummy he could not control. The newly awakened girallon sought only to defend the inner tomb. As he fled from the creature, Yayauhqui watched as the apes presented the "king" with his new queen. The mummy did not harm her, and she willingly went with it into the ziggurat (due to the enchantments upon her crown). Over the past weeks, Yayauhqui has looked on as Cuicatl periodically emerges from the ziggurat to accept the adoration of her ape subjects while the girallon mummy watches over her.

All of this knowledge can be discerned from the witch doctor's copious scribbles. Alternatively, the characters can goad Yayauhqui into revealing what he knows through a suitable skill challenge or even offer him a deal, such as helping him defeat the girallon champion in return for his cooperation. He has no intention of allowing the characters to come away from this experience in possession of the amulet, which he needs to restore the ruler of Cihuatlco to power—a fact that the heroes will quickly discover if they raise the subject.

Yayauhqui has devised a ritual that will allow him to put the mummified girallon to rest, much as the king's advisors once did. The witch doctor has completed the script for the ritual but lacks the components. (The components he requires are in his hut in Itztlico when the adventure begins; see Event 2 for details.) The ritual needs to be performed within the ziggurat, and his few surviving warriors are not up to the task of infiltrating the place. If the

characters present Yayauhqui with the ritual components from his hut and allow him to accompany them to the ziggurat, or if Yayauhqui receives the components from Huitzilin, he gladly performs the ritual. However, he warns them that the girallon must be bloodied in order for the ritual to work. Moreover, it doesn't take an Insight check to know that the witch doctor's intentions are completely self-serving. Conversely, any ritual caster in the party can (with the aid of Yayauhqui's notes and the necessary components) perform the ritual once he or she is inside the ziggurat.

Brazier and Campfire: A creature that enters the space occupied by one of these small fires takes 5 fire damage and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends). A character can use a standard action to extinguish either fire.

Rubble and Undergrowth: The dilapidated portions of the building and jungle undergrowth are difficult terrain.

Tactics: If hostilities erupt, the warriors shoot arrows at intruders. They also call out to Yayauhqui so that the witch doctor can aid them by using *command the jungle*, rooting enemies in place so that the warriors can continue firing arrows. If enemies get too close to Yayauhqui, he uses *sudden stab* to hurl them away or *rebuke* to frighten them. While the battle rages, the hunter uses *heart of the jaguar* to circumvent front-line enemies and attack weaker prey in the back ranks.

Development

If the characters forge a truce with Yayauhqui, award them experience as though they had defeated the witch doctor and his warriors in combat (but do not award additional XP if the characters end up fighting them at some future point).

Whether the characters defeat Yayauhqui in combat, bargain with the witch doctor, or force him to reveal everything he knows, they should obtain the information they need to proceed: They must enter the ziggurat and remove the crown from Cuicatl's head. Doing this will break the spell upon her, at which point she will be eager to return to Jocotopec.

There is much more to the abandoned city than the locations detailed above. Feel free to expand the city, add new encounters, and sow the seeds for future adventures.

Yayauhqui the Witch Doctor (Y) Level 8 Controller
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 350

HP 84; **Bloodied** 42 **Initiative** +4
AC 22, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 21 **Perception** +6
Speed 6

Standard Actions

Dagger (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 3d4 + 9 damage.

Sudden Stab ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Close blast 3 (enemies in the blast); +11 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage, and Yayauhqui pushes the target up to 3 squares.
Miss: Yayauhqui pushes the target 1 square.

Command the Jungle ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +11 vs. Reflex
Hit: The target is restrained and takes ongoing 10 damage (save ends both).

Minor Actions

Rebuke (fear, implement) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +11 vs. Will
Hit: Yayauhqui pushes the target up to 3 squares, and the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of Yayauhqui's next turn.

Skills Nature +11, Religion +11
Str 14 (+6) **Dex** 11 (+4) **Wis** 15 (+6)
Con 12 (+5) **Int** 14 (+6) **Cha** 17 (+7)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common
Equipment dagger, totem, ritual scepter

3 Exiled Tribal Warriors (W) Level 4 Brute
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 175 each

HP 68; **Bloodied** 34 **Initiative** +4
AC 16, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 14 **Perception** +3
Speed 6

Standard Actions

Spear (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage.

Shortbow (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 15 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage.

Driving Spear (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** ⁞⁞
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 3d8 + 9 damage, and the target falls prone.

Skills Athletics +9, Stealth +9
Str 15 (+4) **Dex** 15 (+4) **Wis** 12 (+3)
Con 18 (+6) **Int** 10 (+2) **Cha** 12 (+3)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment spear, shortbow with 20 arrows

Exiled Tribal Hunter (H) Level 8 Lurker
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 350

HP 68; **Bloodied** 34 **Initiative** +12
AC 22, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 19 **Perception** +6
Speed 6 (jungle walk)

Standard Actions

Spear (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 7 damage, or 4d8 + 7 if the hunter has combat advantage against the target.

Throwing Axe (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 9 damage.

Heart of the Jaguar ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The hunter gains combat advantage against one enemy he can see until the end of his next turn and gains total concealment against all other enemies until the start of his next turn.

Skills Athletics +12, Stealth +13
Str 17 (+7) **Dex** 19 (+8) **Wis** 14 (+6)
Con 14 (+6) **Int** 11 (+4) **Cha** 11 (+4)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common
Equipment spear, 3 throwing axes

Event 5: The Ziggurat

Combat Encounter Level 7 (1,525 XP)

The ziggurat is the dominant feature of the city and is visible, at least in part, from nearly everywhere in the valley. Despite being slowly overgrown, it remains mostly intact. The apes regard it as a holy site and accost anyone who approaches it. If the characters observe the site from a distance for a period of hours, they see apes visit the steps of the ziggurat from time to time to present offerings of fruit, flowers, and anything shiny to their queen, who occasionally emerges from the temple atop the ziggurat with her mummified girallon protector close by. At the first sign of anything unusual, she reenters the temple, and the apes begin screaming in a primal frenzy, seeking to attack whatever upset their queen.

Light: Bright light during the day, dim light at night.

Monsters: 3 great apes (A), 4 ape temple guardians (T).

When the party draws near enough to the ziggurat to see it up close, read:

Though you have caught glimpses of the ziggurat many times since arriving in Cihuatlco, standing this close suddenly brings its immensity into sharp focus. Its stony tiers are covered in the same style of elaborate carvings seen throughout the city and wrapped in vines. A steep staircase ascends to a small stone structure at the top.

Apes adorned with feathers and scraps of jewelry march around the base of the ziggurat in a parody of human movements and gestures, and a few brandish crude weapons. High atop the ziggurat, several similar apes hunch forward with baskets of jungle fruits and vividly colored flowers, grunting softly at a beautiful native girl crowned with a circlet of gold and turquoise. She smiles softly with a distant look in her eyes as she receives the gifts and kisses each ape atop its head. As she withdraws into the structure atop the ziggurat, a hulking shadow in the doorway behind her stirs.

Before they can gain entry to the ziggurat, the characters must defeat or bypass the apes outside. The apes staunchly defend this holy site—the place where they first began emulating the culture of Cihuatlco as well as the home of their queen. A clever party of adventurers can attempt to scale the back side of the ziggurat, where the steep climb is unaided by stairs, or they can try to bluff their way past the apes by pretending to take part in the rituals and ceremonies depicted in carvings throughout the city. Such actions can be resolved with group Athletics checks and Stealth checks (for the back-side climb up the ziggurat) or group Bluff checks and Insight checks (for the mimicry of ancient ceremonies). These checks have a DC of 16.

3 Great Apes (A)	Level 4 Skirmisher
Medium natural beast	XP 175 each
HP 55; **Bloodied** 27	**Initiative** +6
AC 18, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 16	**Perception** +4
Speed 7, climb 6	Low-light vision
Traits	
Swift Climber	
The ape does not provoke opportunity attacks by climbing.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Slam** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage.	
⸸ **On the Run** ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The ape shifts or climbs half its speed and uses slam at any point during the move.	
⸸ **Felling Blow** ✦ **Recharge** ⚅	
Effect: The ape uses *slam* twice against the same target. If both attacks hit, the target falls prone.	
Skills Athletics +11	
Str 19 (+6) **Dex** 15 (+4) **Wis** 14 (+4)	
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 2 (-2) **Cha** 8 (+1)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

Steep Stairs: A creature that is knocked prone on the staircase must immediately make a saving throw. On a failed saving throw, the creature tumbles 1d4 squares down the staircase and takes 1d6 damage per square. A creature trained in Acrobatics can reduce this damage by one-half the check result but still lands prone on the staircase.

Tiers: Although the flat tiers of the ziggurat can be traversed normally, each of the steep rises between them requires a DC 15 Athletics check to climb. The tiers are 20 feet (4 squares) apart.

Tactics: The apes use their climbing abilities to gain advantageous positions on the staircase and make efforts to knock enemies down the steep slope of the ziggurat. If an enemy slips past them to reach the tomb entrance at the top of the ziggurat, the closest apes pursue immediately, even if doing so means breaking away from combat.

4 Ape Temple Guardians (T)	Level 6 Soldier
Medium natural beast	XP 250 each
HP 75; **Bloodied** 37	**Initiative** +9
AC 22, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 17	**Perception** +5
Speed 7, climb 5	Low-light vision
Traits	
Swift Climber	
The ape does not provoke opportunity attacks by climbing.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Club** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 7 damage, and the target falls prone.	
⸸ **Swaying Strike** ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The ape uses *club* and then shifts up to 3 squares.	
⸸ **Feast** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one prone creature); +9 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: 1d10 + 9 damage, and the ape gains 10 temporary hit points.	
Skills Athletics +14, Intimidate +7	
Str 22 (+9) **Dex** 19 (+7) **Wis** 15 (+5)	
Con 19 (+7) **Int** 3 (-1) **Cha** 9 (+2)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** understands Common	
Equipment club	

Event 6: The Tomb Within

Combat Encounter Level 10 (2,500 XP)

The small structure atop the ziggurat was constructed for ceremonial purposes. It is furnished with a stone table for offerings and several braziers that were toppled long ago. A winding staircase descends into the stone heart of the ziggurat. Several torches illuminate the way so that Cuicatl can see within the otherwise dark confines. The stairs lead to a pair of antechambers that Yayauhqui mistook for the actual tomb of the king.

Light: Bright light (torches).

Monsters: Cuicatl, mummified girallon (G).

When the characters reach the bottom of the stairs, read:

Ahead of you, sputtering torches reveal a rune-inscribed slab of stone in the center of a small room whose carved walls show scenes of priests interring their king while consoling his four-armed champion, who carries the wrapped corpse up the stairs of the ziggurat. Nearby, another carving shows the same priests holding the grief-stricken champion at bay with some sort of scepter of office as he flies into a rage.

On the other side of the archway on the opposite side of the room rests an enormous sarcophagus, its lid removed and resting against its side. Around it are strewn dying flowers and the pits and rinds of various fruit as well as coins and other small objects. The native girl wearing the crown steps into view, lifting her hands as if to receive a gift; then she drops them to her sides and stares at you with a confused look.

A groan breaks the silence, and a hulking figure in tattered funerary wrappings appears behind the girl. It gently pushes the girl to one side with two of its enormous hands, then beats its chest and bellows. The sound is so loud that the ziggurat itself seems to tremble and spill ancient dust from its stony pores.

While she wears the crown, Cuicatl makes no effort to interfere in the battle but struggles against any attempt to remove her from the presence of her guardian. Meanwhile, the mummified girallon—the king's champion in life—relentlessly pummels trespassers, going so far as to pursue them up the stairs before returning to his queen's side. If the characters abduct Cuicatl, the mummy tirelessly pursues them until it is slain. The characters can put the mummy to rest by performing Yayauhqui's ritual (see below).

Ritual Circle: Any character standing in the ritual circle gains a +2 bonus to all defenses against attacks made by the mummified girallon.

Secret Passage: A bas-relief carving conceals a secret door that is opened by stepping on a concealed stone pedal near the wall. Finding the secret door requires a DC 26 Perception check. Cuicatl is unaware of the secret door's existence, and the girallon does not reveal it under any circumstances. The dusty passage leads to the tomb of the actual king, which is left for the DM to develop (see "Concluding the Adventure").

Torches: Characters can remove the torches and use them as weapons against the mummified girallon. Treat a torch as a club that deals fire damage instead of untyped damage.

Tactics: The mummified girallon uses *bestial fury* on the nearest interlopers and *toss* to keep enemies away from its queen. If a character begins to perform Yayauhqui's ritual, the girallon uses *heedless advance* to reach the offending character and focuses its attacks on that enemy.

Performing Yayauhqui's Ritual

Once the mummified girallon is bloodied, Yayauhqui's ritual can be used to drive it back into its sarcophagus. Once that is done and the sarcophagus lid is replaced, the mummy returns to its eternal rest.

Here are the details of the ritual.

- To perform the ritual, the caster (and anyone intending to aid the caster) must be inside the ritual circle and holding Yayauhqui's ritual scepter.
- On her or her turn, the caster can point the scepter at the sarcophagus and attempt a DC 18 Arcana check or Religion check. If the check succeeds and the mummified girallon is bloodied, the caster can slide the girallon 2 squares toward the sarcophagus. On its next turn, the girallon cannot move closer to the caster.

Mummified Girallon (G)	**Level 10 Solo Brute**
Large natural beast (undead)	XP 2,500
HP 520; **Bloodied** 260	**Initiative** +10
AC 22, **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 20	**Perception** +8
Speed 7, climb 5	Darkvision
Immune disease; **Resist** 10 necrotic, 10 poison	
Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2	
Traits	
☼ **Threatening Claws ✦ Aura** 1	
Enemies within the aura grant combat advantage to the girallon.	
Flammable Corpus	
Whenever the girallon takes fire damage, it also takes ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).	
Single-Minded	
When an effect would stun or dominate the girallon, the girallon is instead dazed.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Rotting Claw** (necrotic) **✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +15 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d8 + 9 necrotic damage, and the target can't regain hit points until the end of the girallon's next turn.	
⸸ **Brutal Grasp** (necrotic) **✦ At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +15 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d8 + 4 necrotic damage, the girallon grabs the target (escape DC 18), and the target takes ongoing 5 necrotic damage until it escapes the grab.	
Sustain Minor: The girallon sustains the grab.	
⸸ **Bestial Fury ✦ At-Will**	
Effect: The girallon uses *rotting claw* once or twice, and uses *brutal grasp* against a different target.	
Move Actions	
Heedless Advance ✦ At-Will	
Effect: The girallon moves up to its speed and gains resist 10 to all damage from opportunity attacks until the end of the current turn.	
Minor Actions	
Toss ✦ At-Will	
Effect: One creature grabbed by the girallon is pushed up to 4 squares, takes 1d10 + 5 damage and falls prone, and is no longer grabbed by the girallon.	
Skills Athletics +17, Intimidate +10	
Str 24 (+12) **Dex** 20 (+10) **Wis** 16 (+8)	
Con 20 (+10) **Int** 8 (+4) Cha 11 (+5)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** understands Common	

- ✦ If the mummified girallon begins its turn fully inside the sarcophagus's space while the ritual is being performed, it lies prone inside the sarcophagus and takes no other actions until the start of its next turn.
- ✦ While the mummified girallon is lying prone in its sarcophagus, a character can make a DC 26 Strength check to slide the lid of the sarcophagus in place and seal the girallon inside or make a DC 26 Thievery check to remove the amulet from around the creature's neck. Once the amulet is removed or the sarcophagus is sealed with the girallon inside, the mummy becomes inanimate.

Cuicatl

Cuicatl's crown can be removed with a DC 23 Thievery check (standard action). Once she is free of the crown's curse, Cuicatl no longer believes she is the queen of Cihuatlco and is happy to flee the ruined city. Until the crown is removed, however, she grieves for her lost guardian and struggles against the party, going so far as to disrupt Yayauhqui's ritual by knocking characters out of the ritual circle. Use the jungle native villager statistics (page 7) for Cuicatl, as needed.

The Queen's Crown

The queen's gold and turquoise crown is worth 2,500 gp. Any female humanoid who dons the crown succumbs to its curse, believing she is the rightful queen of Cihuatlco. Beyond that, the crown confers no special powers upon its wearer. The apes do not recognize anyone other than Cuicatl as their queen, even if confronted by another female character wearing the crown. They assume the crown was stolen from Cuicatl and attack its new wearer without mercy.

The King's Amulet

The amulet worn by the mummified girallon contains a small bit of the dead king's life force. The item is worth 100 gp. It can be used to animate not only the girallon but also the mummified remains of the king, if they can be found. A DC 26 Arcana check or Religion check confirms that not enough of the life force remains to restore the king to life.

If Yayauhqui is still alive and with the party, he demands that the characters give him the amulet. The witch doctor refuses to believe that the amulet lacks the power to restore the king of Cihuatlco and continues trying to achieve that goal, given half a chance. However, he's not foolish enough to attack the characters unless their encounter with the girallon has left them severely weakened.

Concluding the Adventure

The apes of Cihuatlco do not attack the characters as long as Cuicatl is with them and not obviously their prisoner. They will, however, follow Cuicatl back to her village and watch her from a safe distance. The villagers come to realize that the apes feel a connection to her, such that they won't attack if they see that she is safe. Once the apes in turn realize how important she is to the village, they will permit other humans to visit Cihuatlco and take advantage of its resources, so as not to arouse the anger of their queen. This turn of events will give the natives of Jocotopec and Itztlico access to plenty of food and water, assuming the two villages can patch their differences and learn to coexist peacefully.

The ziggurat offers the potential for further adventure. The tomb of Cihuatlco's king can be placed on the other side of the secret door in the mummified girallon's crypt, or the secret passage might lead deeper into the ziggurat where further traps and deathless servants await. Efforts to plumb the tomb's depths might require the characters to emerge and further explore the ruined city for more clues. If they succeed in reaching the king's tomb, they should receive treasure appropriate for their level; see "Awarding Treasures" in the *Rules Compendium* (page 286) for level-appropriate treasures to fill the dead king's trove.

About the Author

John "Ross" Rossomangno is a freelance writer who currently resides in a sleepy Pennsylvania town with his wonderful, remarkably tolerant wife. "Going Ape!" is his second adventure in *Dungeon* after "Devil's Due" (*Dungeon* 188). His days are spent at the keyboard in an ongoing effort to expand his author bio.

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Evard's Shadow

A D&D® adventure for characters of levels 3-5

By Daniel Marthaler

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Introduction

"Evard's Shadow" takes place in the abandoned mansion of the legendary shadow wizard Evard. Within this disused structure, the barriers established by Evard to stand between the world and the dismal Shadowfell are weakening. To halt the degradation, the adventurers must investigate the ruined manse, delve into its dark reflection, and defeat the great wizard's living shadow.

This Dungeons & Dragons® adventure is designed for characters of levels 3-5. The village of Duponde previously appeared in the "Dark Legacy of Evard" D&D Encounters season. Because the adventure takes place partly in the Shadowfell, it includes optional rules for using the Despair Deck from *The Shadowfell: Gloomwrought and Beyond*™ boxed set.

Adventure Background

Evard the Black, best known for his eponymous *Evard's* spells, was the most powerful and well-known

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master of shadow magic in recent history. His *Legendry of Phantoms and Ghosts* remains one of the seminal works of magical studies, and he pioneered the school of nethermancy. His ultimate fate remains a mystery.

Evard lived for a time near the village of Duponde, where he constructed a manor that existed both in the world and in the Shadowfell. During the many years since the wizard last visited the mansion, its decaying reflection has imprisoned his shadow, a dangerous creature given life during a failed experiment with the stuff of pure darkness. Long years of captivity with no company but a ragged band of Evard's former servants, coupled with the fragmented memories inherited at its creation, have convinced the maddened shadow that it is Evard and have fostered within it an abiding hatred of those who remain free. It plans to gain its freedom and its revenge in a single grand gambit: By corrupting Evard's neglected wards, it will force a shadowfall that will plunge the lands around the manor into the chill embrace of the Shadowfell.

Adventure Synopsis

Reaching the abandoned mansion presents significant challenges. The twisting influence of the Shadowfell grows stronger as the adventurers approach, causing them to doubt their senses, and the chill miasma of the plane saps their resolve.

Upon reaching the decaying manor, the characters discover that its formerly well-appointed chambers are overrun with dangerous creatures, including undead, a gang of treasure hunters, and overgrown shrubbery made murderous by shadow-tainted energy. Each reacts violently to the intrusion of the adventurers.

When the party members reach the study, they discover a glowing stone in the center of the room—an arcane focus that permits travel between the mansion and its Shadowfell reflection. Although the stone's purpose is apparent, its method of activation is not, and the adventurers must use their knowledge and ingenuity to coerce the device into forming a connection to the other side. Due to the poor condition of the stone and the advanced nature of the spells involved, the characters have no way of knowing whether the portal is safe, but they must cross over if they hope to solve the mystery and save the area from the Shadowfell's dark embrace.

Upon arriving in the Shadowfell, the characters feel the full force of its soul-numbing bleakness descend on them. Fighting the minions of Evard's shadow while struggling against their own flagging spirits, they press on to reach an intact tower, the mirror of a collapsed structure in the world. Here lurks Evard's cast-off shadow. When the adventurers arrive, it is attempting to discern the perfect time to strike at Evard's neglected wards and channel Shadowfell energy through the weak point between the worlds.

If the shadow is destroyed, its shadowfall-causing scheme dies with it. The flow of Shadowfell influence through the weak point is cut off, and the creeping gloom emanating from the ruined mansion in the world rolls back and returns to its source.

Getting the Heroes Involved

Here are two ways the characters might become involved in the story.

- The adventurers are contacted by Mother Grivelda, a kind old Vistani seer who lives near Duponde. She has foreseen the threat of the growing shadow, and her visions have revealed that the party's swift action holds the key to preventing the coming Shadowfall. Grivelda's knowledge encompasses the contents of the Adventure Background, but her information is a jumble of symbolic visions and scraps assembled from local history. The townsfolk will vouch for her wisdom and abilities.
- While researching Evard, or chatting about him with one of their contacts, the adventurers are surprised to hear a new tale. It describes an abandoned mansion that belonged to the shadow wizard, located in the wilderness near the small town of Duponde. If the structure remains as untouched as the stories suggest, then treasures both mundane and magical surely await souls bold enough to take them.

Duponde

Duponde, the town featured in *Dark Legacy of Evard*, is the logical jumping-off point for any expedition to Evard's manse. A small town of about 1,000, it is the settlement closest to the mansion and sits at the crossroads of several major thoroughfares. The townsfolk are pleasant, and the town's general store sells mundane adventuring gear and common magic items.

The inhabitants know of the abandoned mansion and are willing to provide directions to it, but they make it clear that they believe the mansion is haunted and should be avoided.

The Material Mansion

The following encounters take place around and within Evard's mansion in the world. As adventurers explore its interior, they discover that a dark reflection of the structure exists in the Shadowfell (see page 9 for more information on this dark version of Evard's mansion).

When the characters arrive at the mansion, the map on page 5 comes into play. It shows which areas are used for Encounters M3, M4, and M5.

M1: Reaching the Mansion

Skill Challenge Level 3 (300 XP)

The influence of the Shadowfell turns what should have been a simple hike into an arduous and confusing affair.

To begin the adventure, read:
Miles of wilderness await before you, and you feel the bite of an unseasonably cold wind. Wan sunlight filters through the thin clouds overhead.

The pernicious influence of the Shadowfell grows stronger the closer the adventurers come to the abandoned manor. Trails disappear into the underbrush, landmarks wander, and distances compress and expand alarmingly.

Complexity: 2 (requires 6 successes before 3 failures).

Time Frame: Each character can make a check in this challenge once per hour.

Primary Skills: Endurance, History, Insight, Nature, Perception.

Endurance (DC 9, group check): The party pushes forward at full speed to cover a lot of ground.

History (DC 13): Focusing on tales from the local area, the character successfully compares maps of legend to the party's current surroundings.

Insight (DC 13): The character recognizes that whatever force is slowing the party's progress is also wearing on its spirit.

Nature (DC 13): The angle of the dim sun, faded tracks in the dirt, and a broken twig alongside the trail are as good as any compass. The character leads the party where it needs to go.

Perception (DC 13): The character's keen eyes catch sight of distant landmarks and half-hidden trails. The party stays on track.

Success: The adventurers make it to the abandoned mansion in good time and without tiring themselves. Go to Encounter M2.

Failure: After a circuitous and taxing journey, the adventurers locate the ruins. Each character loses a healing surge due to the arduous nature of the trek. In addition, the wraiths in Encounter M2 begin the battle invisible and cannot be spotted with a Perception check. Go to Encounter M2.

Treasure: None.

M2: Shambling Grounds

Combat Encounter Level 5 (1,050 XP)

Evard's ruined mansion has become a beacon of darkness, attracting undead from miles around to bathe in its outpouring of necrotic energy. Zombies have overrun the forest surrounding the ruins, leaving no approach clear of their rotting embrace. A character who succeeds on a DC 14 Perception check hears faint moaning emanating from the woods on either side of the clearing. A successful DC 21 Perception check reveals two obscured shapes lurking in the trees ahead.

Light: Bright light during the day, darkness at night.

Monsters: 2 wraiths (W), 2 flesh-crazed zombies (F), 6 zombie shamblers (Z).

When the characters reach the clearing, read:
The unsettling quiet that accompanied your journey through the thick woods gives way to a chorus of low moans as you spy a tumbling structure in an overgrown glen ahead. A ragged band of zombies shuffles along the edge of the clearing, blocking your path.

The wraiths have hidden themselves in the shadows; do not place them on the map until they move out to attack or are spotted by a character. If the party failed the skill challenge in Encounter M1, then the wraiths are invisible instead of in hiding.

At the start of the second round of combat, the three zombie shamblers not shown on the map arrive from a map edge (your choice). These reinforcements take no further action on that turn but act normally on subsequent turns.

2 Wraiths (W)	**Level 5 Lurker**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead)	XP 200 each
HP 53; **Bloodied** 26	**Initiative** +10
AC 19, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 15	**Perception** +2
Speed 0, fly 6 (hover); phasing	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic	
Traits	
Insubstantial	
The wraith takes half damage from all attacks, except those that deal force damage. Whenever the wraith takes radiant damage, it loses this trait until the start of its next turn.	
Spawn Wraith	
When the wraith kills a humanoid, that humanoid becomes a wraith figment at the start of this wraith's next turn. The new wraith appears in the space where the humanoid died or in the nearest unoccupied square, and it rolls a new initiative check. The new wraith acts under the Dungeon Master's control.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Shadow Touch** (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d6 + 6 necrotic damage, or 4d6 + 14 necrotic damage if the wraith was invisible to the target when it attacked.	
Triggered Actions	
Shadow Glide (teleportation) ✦ **At-Will**	
Trigger: An attack that does not deal force or radiant damage hits the wraith.	
Effect (Free Action): The wraith becomes invisible until it hits or misses with an attack or until the end of the encounter. The wraith teleports up to 6 squares and cannot attack until the end of its next turn.	
Skills Stealth +11	
Str 4 (-1) **Dex** 18 (+6) **Wis** 10 (+2)	
Con 17 (+5) **Int** 6 (+0) **Cha** 15 (+4)	
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common	

2 Flesh-Crazed Zombies (F)	Level 4 Skirmisher
Medium natural animate (undead)	XP 175 each
HP 55; **Bloodied** 27	**Initiative** +6
AC 18, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 14	**Perception** +3
Speed 6 (8 when charging)	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison	
Traits	
Flesh-Crazed Charge	
While the zombie is charging, its movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.	
Zombie Weakness	
A critical hit automatically reduces the zombie to 0 hit points.	
Standard Actions	
Club ✦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d8 + 6 damage, or 2d8 + 6 if the zombie charged the target.	
Bite ✦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the zombie's next turn.	
Triggered Actions	
Deathless Hunger ✦ Encounter	
Trigger: The zombie is reduced to 0 hit points, but not by a critical hit.	
Effect (No Action): Roll a d20. On a 15 or higher, the zombie is instead reduced to 1 hit point.	
Str 18 (+6) **Dex** 15 (+4) **Wis** 13 (+3)	
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 1 (-3) **Cha** 3 (-2)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	
Equipment club	

Stone Wall: This low, crumbling wall provides partial cover and is difficult terrain.

Treasure: None.

Tactics: The wraiths remain hidden until they can pounce on an unsuspecting character. They avoid characters who are capable of dealing radiant or force damage, but they readily engage anyone else in the hope of triggering *shadow glide*. When rendered invisible by this power, wraiths turn their attention toward characters who deal radiant damage or force damage. The extra damage they deal with *shadow touch* when they are invisible makes them formidable foes.

6 Zombie Shamblers (Z)	Level 5 Minion Brute
Medium natural animate (undead)	XP 50 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +1	
AC 17, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 15, **Will** 15	**Perception** +1
Speed 4	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison	
Standard Actions	
Slam ✦ At-Will	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC	
Hit: 8 damage.	
Triggered Actions	
Deathless Hunger ✦ Encounter	
Trigger: The zombie is reduced to 0 hit points, but not by a critical hit.	
Effect (No Action): Roll a d20. On a 15 or higher, the zombie is instead reduced to 1 hit point.	
Str 18 (+6) **Dex** 8 (+1) **Wis** 8 (+1)	
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 1 (-3) **Cha** 3 (-2)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

The shamblers swarm individual targets, while the zombies use *flesh-crazed charge* to break through the battle lines and reach easier prey.

M3: Dinner Guests

Combat Encounter Level 4 (950 XP)

A few wandering undead linger in the front area of the crumbling mansion, finishing off the treasure hunters they ambushed earlier.

Light: Bright light during the day, darkness at night.

Monsters: 3 ghouls (G), 4 decrepit skeletons (S), 1 mad wraith (W).

As the characters approach the mansion, read:
A formerly stately mansion stands crumbling before you, its top floors tumbled, its finery rotted away, and its windows fallen into deep pools of shadow. The front doors stand ajar, their hinges rusted in place. Through the opening, you can make out a hunched humanoid shape crouching in the corner of what used to be the foyer.

The ghouls inhabiting these rooms are distracted by the remains of a few treasure hunters they ambushed earlier, and each creature has backed into a separate corner to enjoy its meal. The skeletons stand where they were when they lost sight of the last living intruder. The wraith floats aimlessly from room to room.

Garden Doors: These doors have been rusted shut for years, and the southern door requires a DC 14 Strength check to pry open. The northern door was recently wrenched open and then closed again by the enigma of Vecna's men, so a DC 10 Strength check is sufficient to force it open.

Ruined Furniture: The ruins of the sturdier furnishings remain solid enough to impede movement and count as difficult terrain.

Second Story: The second story has lost structural integrity over the years, but nimble characters can attempt to navigate its rotting boards and rickety beams. A successful DC 14 Athletics check enables a character to climb up to this level. Moving across

the unsteady floor requires a successful DC 14 Acrobatics check, and the floor is difficult terrain. A character who fails this check by 5 or more plunges through the floorboards, takes 1d10 damage, and falls prone on the ground floor. Tactically, the patchwork floor is both friend and foe: It provides partial cover to creatures on a different level, but a creature on the second floor that takes damage must make a saving throw to avoid falling through the floor. If the creature saves, it falls prone in the last square it occupied before it would have fallen. Otherwise, it plummets through the floor, falls prone, and takes 1d10 damage. Creatures trained in Acrobatics can make a check to reduce the damage of the fall and possibly land standing.

Treasure: 70 gp scattered among the ghouls' dismembered victims.

3 Ghouls (G)		**Level 5 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid (undead)		XP 200 each
HP 63; **Bloodied** 31		**Initiative** +8
AC 21, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 16		**Perception** +2
Speed 8, climb 4		Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic		
Traits		
Weakened Paralysis		
Whenever the ghoul takes radiant damage, one creature immobilized or stunned by the ghoul can make a saving throw against one of those effects.		
Standard Actions		
⊕ **Claws ✦ At-Will**		
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC		
Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).		
⸸ **Ghoulish Bite ✦ At-Will**		
Attack: Melee 1 (one immobilized, restrained, stunned, or unconscious creature); +10 vs. AC		
Hit: 4d6 + 6 damage, and the target is stunned (save ends).		
Skills Stealth +11		
Str 14 (+4)	**Dex** 19 (+6)	**Wis** 11 (+2)
Con 15 (+4)	**Int** 10 (+2)	**Cha** 12 (+3)
Alignment chaotic evil	**Languages** Common	

Mad Wraith (W)	**Level 6 Controller**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead)	XP 250
HP 73; **Bloodied** 36	**Initiative** +8
AC 20, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 18	**Perception** -1
Speed 0, fly 6 (hover); phasing	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic	
Traits	
☼ **Mad Whispers** (psychic) ✦ **Aura** 3	
Any enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 5 psychic damage, and the wraith slides it up to 2 squares.	
Insubstantial	
The wraith takes half damage from all attacks, except those that deal force damage. Whenever the wraith takes radiant damage, it loses this trait until the start of its next turn.	
Spawn Wraith	
When the wraith kills a humanoid, that humanoid becomes a wraith figment at the start of this wraith's next turn. The new wraith appears in the space where the humanoid died or in the nearest unoccupied square, and it rolls a new initiative check. The new wraith acts under the Dungeon Master's control.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Touch of Madness** (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. Will	
Hit: 2d6 + 7 psychic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to all defenses (save ends).	
⸸ **Touch of Chaos** (charm, psychic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. Will	
Hit: 2d6 + 7 psychic damage, and the wraith slides the target up to 5 squares. The target must then use a free action to make a basic attack against its nearest ally.	
Miss: Half damage, and the wraith slides the target up to 2 squares.	
Skills Stealth +13	
Str 6 (+1) **Dex** 20 (+8) **Wis** 3 (-1)	
Con 17 (+6) **Int** 11 (+3) **Cha** 19 (+7)	
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common	

Tactics: When combat is joined, the ghouls rush into the fray, targeting immobilized characters and attempting to snap off a tasty morsel. The skeletons provide fire support, using their mobility to strike and retreat around doorways or behind cover. The wraith takes advantage of its phasing to move through the walls and attack from unexpected directions, It strives to keep as many characters as possible within its *mad whispers* aura. The skeletons and the wraith fight until destroyed, but a bloodied ghoul will run if its allies are defeated.

4 Decrepit Skeletons (S)	**Level 1 Minion Skirmisher**
Medium natural animate (undead)	XP 25 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	**Initiative** +5
AC 16, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 13	**Perception** +2
Speed 6	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Longsword** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The skeleton can shift 1 square before the attack.	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC	
Hit: 4 damage.	
⊕ **Shortbow** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The skeleton can shift 1 square before the attack.	
Attack: Ranged 20 (one creature); +6 vs. AC	
Hit: 3 damage.	
Str 15 (+2) **Dex** 17 (+3) **Wis** 14 (+2)	
Con 13 (+1) **Int** 3 (-4) **Cha** 3 (-4)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	
Equipment longsword, shortbow, 20 arrows	

M4: The Night Garden

Combat Encounter Level 4 (900 XP)

The shadow-tainted and overgrown plants of the garden attack any who dare trespass. A character who succeeds on a DC 14 Perception check spies a hand concealed beneath a tangle of vegetation and notices that one of the coils of vines is shaped like a tightly wrapped corpse.

Light: Bright light during the day, dim light at night (pale moonlight).

Monsters: 4 grasping zombies (Z), 4 twig blights (B).

As the characters enter the garden, read:

What must have been a courtyard garden is now the stuff of a gardener's nightmare. Thick, twisted vines, bristling with cruel thorns, run riot throughout the area, pour into the adjacent rooms, and wind their way up ancient stone pillars. The blackened skeletons of trees shiver as if blown by some unfelt wind.

With the sound of tearing flesh and snapping wood, four bloodless corpses surge from the packed vegetation, trailing streamers of thorny vines.

A successful DC 10 Arcana check or Nature check reveals that the thorn bushes have been tainted by the pervading energy of the Shadowfell, which caused their rampant growth as well as their odd coloration.

4 Grasping Zombies (Z)	**Level 1 Brute**
Medium natural animate (undead)	XP 100 each
HP 33; **Bloodied** 16	**Initiative** -1
AC 13, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 11, **Will** 11	**Perception** -1
Speed 4	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison	
Traits	
Zombie Weakness	
A critical hit automatically reduces the zombie to 0 hit points.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Slam** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d12 + 3 damage, or 1d12 + 8 against a grabbed target.	
⸸ **Zombie Grasp** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +4 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 1d6 + 3 damage, and the zombie grabs the target (escape DC 12) if it does not have a creature grabbed.	
Triggered Actions	
Deathless Hunger ✦ **Encounter**	
Trigger: The zombie is reduced to 0 hit points, but not by a critical hit.	
Effect (No Action): Roll a d20. On a 15 or higher, the zombie is instead reduced to 1 hit point.	
Str 16 (+3) **Dex** 8 (-1) **Wis** 8 (-1)	
Con 13 (+1) **Int** 1 (-5) **Cha** 3 (-4)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –	

4 Twig Blights (B)	Level 2 Lurker
Small fey humanoid (plant)	XP 125 each
HP 28; **Bloodied** 14	**Initiative** +9
AC 16, **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 14	**Perception** +8
Speed 5 (forest walk), climb 5	Darkvision
Resist 5 poison; **Vulnerable** 5 fire	
Traits	
Rooted	
When an effect forces the blight to move through a pull, a push, or a slide, the seedling can move 3 squares fewer than the effect specifies.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Claw** (poison) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC	
Hit: 1d6 + 7 poison damage.	
ǂ **Blighted Claw** (poison) ✦ **Recharge** when the blight uses *invisibility*	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 8 poison damage, and the target is weakened (save ends).	
Miss: Half damage, and the target is weakened until the end of its next turn.	
Invisibility (illusion) ✦ **Recharge** when the blight uses *blighted claw*	
Effect: The blight becomes invisible until the start of its next turn.	
Skills Stealth +10	
Str 8 (+0) **Dex** 18 (+5) **Wis** 14 (+3)	
Con 10 (+1) **Int** 6 (-1) **Cha** 10 (+1)	
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Elven	

The twig blights are not initially placed on the map; they remain hidden in the deepest recesses of the morass until they move to attack.

The rooms and the covered walkways teeter on the verge of collapse and cannot support the weight of a climber.

Thorny Vines: Thorny vines have overrun the garden, creating areas of difficult terrain. In addition, any creature without forest walk that enters a square of thorny vines takes 2 damage.

Treasure: A common level 7 item, found on a body wrapped in vines.

Tactics: The zombies throw themselves at the nearest character, heedless of the damage they might take in the process, focused on grabbing and bludgeoning the adventurers. The twig blights strike with *blighted claw*, then retreat through the thorns (which they ignore thanks to their forest walk) to deter pursuit. They then turn invisible, thereby recharging their *blighted claw*, and prepare to begin the cycle anew.

M5: Barricaded Study

Combat Encounter Level 4 (905 XP)

The survivors of an ill-fated band of brigands and looters have barricaded themselves in the remains of Evard's study. They invite the adventurers into their sanctum, intending to jump them as soon as they let their guard down. Upon entering the room, a character who succeed on a DC 14 Perception check notices that more gear lies scattered about than six men should need. A successful DC 21 Perception check enables a character to spot the pair of stealthy figures skulking in the back room with their blackened weapons drawn.

Light: Bright light (sunlight and magical).

Monsters: 1 enigma of Vecna (E), 4 common bandits (B), 5 human goons (G).

When the adventurers reach the study door, read:

With a rusty screech of protest, a heavy wooden door scrapes open, and a rough-looking human motions you over. "In here, quick," he hisses.

The room behind him, which appears to have been a spacious library or study, is the most intact that you have seen in the mansion. The shelves lining its walls are unbroken, and their contents, though moldering, remain upright. A number of tables and chairs remain in usable condition. Atop a pedestal in the center of the room, a glowing crystal provides wavering illumination that throws misshapen shadows against the walls.

Several more humans, one wearing simple robes and the rest dressed in rough armor, are scattered about the room, rifling through parchments or keeping watch.

The bandit holding the door, clearly concerned that undead creatures might show up at any moment, urges the characters to enter quickly. If the adventurers hesitate, he reassures them by promising to answer any questions they have after everyone is inside. A successful DC 14 Insight check reveals that, while he genuinely wants to bring everyone inside and bar the door against the undead, something more than charity or mutual protection motivates his offer of aid.

If the characters tarry too long or give other hints that they see through the deception, the enigma of Vecna opens fire and the brigands pour forth to attack. Otherwise, it waits until the adventurers reach the center of the room to spring the ambush.

The two bandits in the smaller room are hiding when the party enters. Keep them off the map until they move to attack or are spotted by an observant character.

Shelves: The heavy shelves are secured to the walls and cannot be pried loose easily. Most of their contents have decayed beyond salvation.

Tables and Chairs: These furnishings are decrepit enough to be difficult terrain and sturdy enough to provide partial cover.

Shadow Stone: The glowing crystal is anchored to the stone pillar upon which it rests and cannot be moved. Closer inspection (not possible until combat is resolved) leads to Encounter M6.

Treasure: A careful search of the shelves reveals intact copies of Telaris's *On the Nature of Shadow* and Burnhart's *Treatise Alchemic*, each worth 250 gp. The brigands carry a total of 50 gp.

Tactics: The goons fight like a mob. They swarm characters rather than engaging them in single combat and always try to remain within 5 squares of

4 Common Bandits (B) **Level 2 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 125 each

HP 37; **Bloodied** 18 **Initiative** +6
AC 16, **Fortitude** 12, **Reflex** 14, **Will** 12 **Perception** +1
Speed 6

Traits

Combat Advantage
The bandit deals 1d6 extra damage against any creature granting combat advantage to it.

Standard Actions

Mace (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage, and the bandit can shift 1 square.

Dagger (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 1d4 + 5 damage, and the bandit can shift 1 square.

Dazing Strike (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** when the attack misses
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the bandit's next turn.
Effect: The bandit can shift 1 square.

Skills Stealth +9, Streetwise +7, Thievery +9
Str 12 (+2) **Dex** 17 (+4) **Wis** 11 (+1)
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 10 (+1) **Cha** 12 (+2)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment leather armor, mace, 4 daggers

5 Human Goons (G) **Level 2 Minion Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, human XP 31 each

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +3
AC 15, **Fortitude** 13, **Reflex** 11, **Will** 11 **Perception** +2
Speed 6

Traits

Mob Rule
While at least two other human goons are within 5 squares of the goon, it gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses.

Standard Actions

Club (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +7 vs. AC
Hit: 5 damage.

Str 14 (+3) **Dex** 11 (+1) **Wis** 12 (+2)
Con 12 (+2) **Int** 9 (+0) **Cha** 13 (+2)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment club

Enigma of Vecna (E) **Level 6 Controller**
Medium natural humanoid XP 250

HP 68; **Bloodied** 34 **Initiative** +5
AC 20, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 19 **Perception** +10
Speed 6

Standard Actions

Dagger (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 2d4 + 7 damage.

Rend Flesh ✦ **At-Will**
Requirement: The enigma must be affected by *horrific visage*.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 2d12 + 5 damage.

Memory Ripper (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +10 vs. Will
Hit: 1d6 + 5 psychic damage, and the target cannot use encounter attack powers, daily attack powers, or utility powers (save ends).
Aftereffect: The target is dazed until the end of its next turn.

Shock Bolt (lightning) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +9 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d10 + 5 lightning damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the enigma's next turn.

Triggered Actions

Horrific Visage (healing, psychic) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The enigma is first bloodied.
Attack (No Action): Close burst 2 (enemies in burst); +10 vs. Will
Hit: 1d8 + 3 psychic damage, and the enigma pushes the target 3 squares.
Effect: Until the end of the encounter, the enigma cannot use any power except *rend flesh*.

Skills Arcana +13
Str 12 (+4) **Dex** 15 (+5) **Wis** 15 (+5)
Con 12 (+4) **Int** 20 (+8) **Cha** 16 (+6)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common
Equipment dagger

other goons. The bandits, preferring to maintain their distance and throw daggers, do not engage in melee unless they have combat advantage or are left with no other choice. They alternate using *dazing strike*, so that the other bandits can capitalize on the combat advantage granted by the dazed target. The enigma favors staying on the sidelines and hurling *memory ripper*, the aftereffect of which also provides combat advantage to the bandits. When the enigma's *horrific visage* is triggered, the creature tears into the nearest bloodied character without regard for its survival.

While the enigma lives, the others continue to fight. A bloodied bandit or surrounded goon will surrender if the enigma and all allies are slain, however.

M6: The Shadow Stone

Skill Challenge Level 4 (525 XP)

The glowing crystal occupying the center of the study is the arcane focus that allowed Evard and his servants to slip between this mansion and its reflection in the Shadowfell.

When a character examines the crystal, read:
Tiny, arcane runes of transportation are inscribed on the surface of the shimmering crystal, and hairline fractures spread across its facets in spiderweb patterns. When the crystal is viewed out of the corner of your eye, you see the shadows cast by its light twist and move of their own volition; when you turn to look directly at it, everything appears normal.

The crystal is obviously magical, and a cursory inspection by a character who has training in Arcana reveals that it is a transportation device. Safely activating it requires more expertise than evaluating its purpose, because its protective wards have been badly damaged over the years.

Complexity: 3 (requires 8 successes before 3 failures).

Time Frame: Each character can make a check in this challenge once per minute.

Primary Skills: Arcana, History, Perception, Religion, Thievery

Arcana (DC 14): The character follows the paths of magical energy within the device to unravel their function. A character who gets a result of 21 or higher on this check gains an additional success as the adventurer comprehends the deep inner workings of the stone.

History (DC 21): The character reflects on tales of Evard's habits and dredges up a useful bit of lore.

Perception (DC 14): Based on the patterns of wear on the crystal's surface, the character pieces together a few minor clues regarding its operation.

Religion (DC 14): Taking an unorthodox approach, the character uses prayers and knowledge of divine runes of protection to patch together the crystal's damaged safeguards.

Thievery (DC 14): The character works backwards, reconnecting the protective spells and power supplies that a thief would normally disable. A character who gets a result of 21 or higher on this check can choose to remove a failure that has been earned in the challenge rather than counting this result as a success.

Success: The party activates the stone without further compromising its weakened wards and is transported to the Shadowfell. Go to Encounter S1. Despite the party's success in activating the stone, the journey is not easy, and the full force of the Shadowfell leaves the characters dazed until the end of their first turn.

Failure: The stone transports the party to the Shadowfell, but the wards temporarily collapse during transit, exposing the characters to the unfettered energies of that dismal place. Go to Encounter S1. The characters are surprised at the start of the encounter. In addition, they take a –2 penalty to rolls to overcome the effects of any Despair Deck cards while they remain in the Shadowfell. If you are not using the Despair Deck, the characters arrive dazed (save ends).

Treasure: None.

The Shadowfell Reflection

The heroes have crossed into the inhospitable Shadowfell. The wards that Evard established long ago to keep the plane's draining influence at bay are corrupted, and nothing stands between the characters and the Shadowfell's full, dismal power.

When the characters arrive in the Shadowfell, the map on page 10 comes into play. It shows which areas of the mansion are used for Encounters S1, S2, and S3.

Despair Deck: If you are using the Despair Deck, have each player draw a card from it. A player's card affects his or her character.

If you are not using the Despair Deck, each character starts Encounter S1 dazed until the end of his or her first turn. If the party failed the skill check in Encounter M6, they are instead dazed (save ends).

S1: Evard's Tentacles

Combat Encounter Level 4 (950 XP)

A version of *Evard's black tentacles* protects the Shadowfell side of the wizard's mansion from unwanted guests.

Light: Dim light (magical).

Monsters: 2 hex knights (K), 2 shadow bolters (B).

As the adventurers activate the crystal, read:

No flash blinds you, and no swirling portal appears; you remain in the same room, and yet it is not the same: A soul-numbing cold pierces the air, and the lights appear dimmer. Dread grips your heart. Shadows cast in the fitful illumination take on a weight and presence beyond the light that cast them, as if the shadows were the source and the light a pale reflection.

You have enough time to note that the area is occupied by a small group of diminutive humanoids, swathed in dark cloaks and wearing shocked expressions, before the floor explodes into a writhing nest of shadowy tentacles.

2 Hex Knights (K) — **Level 4 Soldier**
Small shadow humanoid, dark one — XP 175 each

HP 54; **Bloodied** 27 — **Initiative** +7
AC 20, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15 — **Perception** +3
Speed 6 — Darkvision

Standard Actions

Short Sword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The hex knight makes the following attack twice.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the hex knight's next turn.

Hand Crossbow (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10/20 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage.

Vicious Flurry (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Melee 1 (one or two creatures); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage, and the target is slowed and takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends both).

Move Actions

Dark Step ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The hex knight moves 4 squares, gains a +4 bonus to AC against opportunity attacks provoked by this movement, and gains combat advantage against each creature that it ends its move adjacent to until the end of the hex knight's next turn.

Minor Actions

Shadow Hex ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: One creature within 3 squares of the hex knight is marked until the end of the encounter or until the hex knight uses *shadow hex* again. While the creature is marked by the hex knight, whenever it makes an attack that does not include the hex knight as a target, it grants combat advantage until the end of its next turn.

Triggered Actions

Killing Dark
Trigger: The hex knight drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (No Action): Each enemy adjacent to the hex knight is blinded until the end of his or her next turn.

Skills Athletics +9, Stealth +10

Str 15 (+4)	**Dex** 16 (+5)	**Wis** 12 (+3)
Con 14 (+4)	**Int** 11 (+2)	**Cha** 11 (+2)

Alignment unaligned — **Languages** Common
Equipment hide armor, 2 short swords, hand crossbow, 10 bolts

2 Shadow Bolters (B)	**Level 5 Artillery**
Small shadow humanoid, dark one	XP 200 each
HP 50; **Bloodied** 25	**Initiative** +6
AC 17, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 16	**Perception** +9
Speed 6	Darkvision

Traits

Combat Advantage (necrotic)

Whenever the shadow bolter hits a creature granting combat advantage to it, the bolter deals 5 extra necrotic damage, and each of that creature's adjacent allies takes 5 necrotic damage.

Deadly Precision

The shadow bolter's ranged attacks have combat advantage against any enemy that the bolter's allies are flanking.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Dagger** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC

Hit: 1d4 + 5 damage.

⊛ **Black Bolt** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**

Attack: Ranged 15/30 (one creature); +10 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 1d8 + 5 damage, and the target takes 5 damage each time it provokes an opportunity attack (save ends).

Move Actions

Dark Step ✦ **At-Will**

Effect: The bolter moves 4 squares, gains a +4 bonus to AC against opportunity attacks provoked by this movement, and gains combat advantage against each creature that it ends its move adjacent to until the end of the bolter's next turn.

Triggered Actions

Killing Dark

Trigger: The bolter drops to 0 hit points.

Effect (No Action): Each enemy adjacent to the bolter is blinded until the end of his or her next turn.

Skills Stealth +11

Str 11 (+2)	**Dex** 18 (+6)	**Wis** 15 (+4)
Con 14 (+4)	**Int** 11 (+2)	**Cha** 11 (+2)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common

Equipment dagger, crossbow, 20 bolts, silk rope (50 ft.), grappling hook

Evard's Tentacle Trap	Level 5 Trap
Terrain	XP 200
Detect Perception DC 22	**Initiative** +7
HP 15 per square of tentacles	
AC 16, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 15, **Will** –	
Immune necrotic, poison, psychic, forced movement, all conditions, ongoing damage	
Resist 5 area and close attacks	
Traits	
☼ **Writhing Tentacles** ✦ **Aura** 1	
Enemies treat squares within the aura as difficult terrain.	
Standard Actions	
ǂ **Tentacle Grab** ✦ **At-Will**	
Requirement: The trap square's tentacle must not already be grabbing a creature.	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature not already grabbed by a tentacle); +8 vs. Reflex, one attack per trap square	
Hit: 1d8+7 damage, and the target is grabbed (escape DC 15) and pulled 1 square. While grabbed, the target takes ongoing 5 damage.	
Sustain Minor: The grab persists until the end of the tentacle trap's next turn.	
Countermeasures	
✦ **Disable:** Thievery DC 22. *Success:* A single square and its associated tentacle no longer function.	
✦ **Delay:** Thievery DC 15. *Success:* A single square and its associated tentacle cease to function for 1d4 rounds.	

A character who succeeds on a DC 10 Arcana check or Religion check can confirm that the party has arrived in the Shadowfell. A successful DC 10 Nature check reveals that the adventurers are no longer in the material world.

Shelves: The heavy shelves are secured to the walls and cannot be pried loose easily. Most of their contents have decayed beyond salvation.

Tables and Chairs: These furnishings are sturdy enough to provide partial cover and to constitute difficult terrain.

Treasure: In addition to moldering books, the shelves yield a decanter of magically preserved brandy (worth 250 gp) and an uncommon level 6 item.

Tactics: Evard's trap produces a tentacle in each of the six squares outlined in white on the map. As the characters begin to deal with the trap, the dark ones gang up on them. The hex knights employ their slowing attacks to trap characters within the tentacles' reach, where the grasping tendrils will do their work for them. They flank enemies when possible to gain combat advantage for themselves and the shadow bolters.

When the last dark one falls, the tentacle trap loses power and returns to dormancy.

S2. The Pool of Midnight

Combat Encounter Level 5 (1,150 XP)

A Shadowfell version of a reflecting pond, this pool is guarded by zealous dark ones and their undead servants. A character who succeeds on a DC 10 Perception check notices that the tower of Evard's mansion, a crumbling ruin in the natural world, still stands in the Shadowfell.

With a successful DC 14 Perception check, an adventurer notices a light dusting of frost along the low border of the reflecting pool.

Light: Dim light (magical).

Monsters: 2 shadow speakers (S), 1 mad wraith (W), 2 ghouls (G).

When the characters reach the pool, read:
In place of the overgrown garden of the natural world, a mirror-smooth pool of obsidian water dominates this shadowy place. Two diminutive creatures, not unlike the ones you recently fought, stare reverently into the pool. A dark shadow cackles quietly as it flits between the decaying forms of two bony ghouls.

The shadow speakers are too intent on gazing into the pool to notice the adventurers and are automatically surprised when the party enters the area.

2 Shadow Speakers (S)	Level 6 Controller
Small shadow humanoid, dark one	XP 250 each
HP 70; **Bloodied** 35	**Initiative** +7
AC 20, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 18	**Perception** +7
Speed 6	Darkvision

Standard Actions

Short Sword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 7 damage.

Shadow Curse (implement, necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +9 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + 7 necrotic damage, and the target grants combat advantage and takes 5 damage each time it provokes an opportunity attack (save ends both).

Choking Shadow (implement, necrotic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +9 vs. Will
Hit: 3d6 + 11 necrotic damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of the speaker's next turn.

Move Actions

Dark Step ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The speaker moves 4 squares, gains a +4 bonus to AC against opportunity attacks provoked by this movement, and gains combat advantage against each creature that it ends its move adjacent to until the end of the shadow speaker's next turn.

Triggered Actions

Killing Dark
Trigger: The speaker drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (No Action): Each enemy adjacent to the speaker is blinded until the end of his or her next turn.

Skills Arcana +10, Religion +10

Str 11 (+3)	**Dex** 18 (+7)	**Wis** 18 (+7)
Con 14 (+5)	**Int** 15 (+5)	**Cha** 13 (+4)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment short sword, wand, 3 jars of Shadowfell soil

Mad Wraith (W)	Level 6 Controller
Medium shadow humanoid (undead)	XP 250
HP 73; **Bloodied** 36	**Initiative** +8
AC 20, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 18	**Perception** -1
Speed 0, fly 6 (hover); phasing	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic	

Traits

Mad Whispers (psychic) ✦ **Aura** 3
Any enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 5 psychic damage, and the wraith slides it up to 2 squares.

Insubstantial
The wraith takes half damage from all attacks, except those that deal force damage. Whenever the wraith takes radiant damage, it loses this trait until the start of its next turn.

Spawn Wraith
When the wraith kills a humanoid, that humanoid becomes a wraith figment at the start of this wraith's next turn. The new wraith appears in the space where the humanoid died or in the nearest unoccupied square, and it rolls a new initiative check. The new wraith acts under the Dungeon Master's control.

Standard Actions

Touch of Madness (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. Will
Hit: 2d6 + 7 psychic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to all defenses (save ends).

Touch of Chaos (charm, psychic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. Will
Hit: 2d6 + 7 psychic damage, and the wraith slides the target up to 5 squares. The target must then use a free action to make a basic attack against its nearest ally.
Miss: Half damage, and the wraith slides the target up to 2 squares.

Skills Stealth +13

Str 6 (+1)	**Dex** 20 (+8)	**Wis** 3 (-1)
Con 17 (+6)	**Int** 11 (+3)	**Cha** 19 (+7)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common

2 Ghouls (G)	Level 5 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid (undead)	XP 200 each
HP 63; **Bloodied** 31	**Initiative** +8
AC 21, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 16	**Perception** +2
Speed 8, climb 4	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic	

Traits

Weakened Paralysis
Whenever the ghoul takes radiant damage, one creature immobilized or stunned by the ghoul can make a saving throw against one of those effects.

Standard Actions

Claws ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

Ghoulish Bite ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one immobilized, restrained, stunned, or unconscious creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 4d6 + 6 damage, and the target is stunned (save ends).

Skills Stealth +11

Str 14 (+4)	**Dex** 19 (+6)	**Wis** 11 (+2)
Con 15 (+4)	**Int** 10 (+2)	**Cha** 12 (+3)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Common

The rooms and the covered walkways teeter on the verse of collapse and cannot support the weight of a climber.

Pool of Midnight: The reflecting pool is a few feet deep. Its waters sap the warmth from anything that touches them. A creature that enters the pool or ends its turn there takes 5 cold damage and 5 necrotic damage. The squares of the pool are difficult terrain.

Treasure: None.

Tactics: The monsters are well aware of the pool's frigid water and adjust their tactics accordingly. The wraith slides characters into the pool using its aura or *touch of chaos*, whereupon the shadow speakers employ *choking shadow* to immobilize victims in the freezing water.

The dark ones and the wraith also use the pool as a shield against melee characters. The dark ones maneuver to keep the pool between themselves and attackers, and the wraith hovers above the center when not using its touch attacks. The ghouls try to pin down ranged threats or otherwise support their dark one masters; however, their inability to resist the lure of immobilized prey sometimes causes them to forsake their duty in favor of an easy victim. The creatures fight to the bitter end. The last shadow speaker, when it senses its doom is near, will hurl itself into the frigid water rather than be parted from its beloved pool.

S3. The Master's Chambers

Combat Encounter Level 5 (1,027 XP)

The spaces that served as the mansion's entry areas and public rooms in the world are laboratory and research spaces in its Shadowfell reflection. Nadir, an ancient dark one butler whose scattered mind is lost in ages past, tries to keep these rooms in good repair, but one deranged and senile servant is no match for the ravages of time.

Light: Dim light (magical).

Monsters: Nadir, dark one butler (N), 3 flesh-crazed zombies (Z), 4 wraith figments (W).

As the adventurers enter the chambers, read:

A series of laboratory, research, and ritual spaces stand in place of the ruined entryways and sitting rooms that you passed through in the world. Occasional clean spots—a half-dusted table, a neatly arranged collection of shattered vials on a collapsed shelf— stand out here and there in contrast to the general decay of the dust-shrouded rubble.

A weak, cracked voice drifts in from another room, accompanied by the sound of tinkling glass and sweeping.

"We must keep things tidy for the Master," says the voice. "He will want everything the way he left it when he returns, yes he will. Nadir will see to it, won't we?"

The singsong of the one-sided conversation is a strange counterpoint to the uneven shuffle of a zombie that lurches into view, its one foot bearing a freshly polished boot.

The doors leading into this area are well oiled and move easily.

Ruined Furniture: The ruins of the sturdier furnishings are solid enough to impede movement and count as difficult terrain.

Second Story: The second story has lost structural integrity over the years, but nimble characters can attempt to navigate its rotting boards and rickety beams. A successful DC 14 Athletics check enables a character to climb up to this level. Moving across the unsteady floor requires a successful DC 14 Acrobatics check, and the floor is difficult terrain. A character who fails this check by 5 or more plunges through the floorboards, takes 1d10 damage, and falls prone on the ground floor. Tactically, the patchwork floor is both friend and foe: It provides partial cover to creatures on a different level, but a creature on the second floor that takes damage must make a saving throw to avoid falling through the floor. If the creature saves, it falls prone in the last square it occupied before it would have fallen. Otherwise, it plummets through the floor, falls prone, and takes 1d10 damage. Creatures trained in Acrobatics can make a check to reduce the damage of the fall and possibly land standing.

Nadir, Dark One Butler (N) — **Level 6 Controller**
Small shadow humanoid — XP 250

HP 70; **Bloodied** 35 — **Initiative** +7
AC 20, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 18, **Will** 18 — **Perception** +7
Speed 6 — Darkvision

Standard Actions

Sickle and Broom (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 2d4 + 7 damage, and Nadir pushes the target 1 square and knocks it prone.

Unlabeled Vial ✦ **At-Will** (6/encounter)
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +9 vs. Reflex
Hit: Roll a d4:
1. Ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends).
2. 2d6 cold damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).
3. 2d6 radiant damage, and the target is blinded (save ends).
4. The target gains 5 temporary hit points and is dazed (save ends).

Rubbish Blast ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Close blast 5 (enemies in the blast); +9 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + 7 damage, and the target is knocked prone.

Move Actions

Dark Step ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Effect: Nadir shifts 4 squares and gains combat advantage against each creature that it ends its move adjacent to until the end of Nadir's next turn.

Triggered Actions

Killing Dark ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: Nadir drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (No Action): Each enemy adjacent to Nadir is blinded until the end of his or her next turn.

Skills Arcana +10, History +10
Str 11 (+3) **Dex** 18 (+7) **Wis** 18 (+7)
Con 14 (+5) **Int** 15 (+5) **Cha** 13 (+4)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment broom, sickle, 6 unlabeled vials

3 Flesh-Crazed Zombies (Z) — **Level 4 Skirmisher**
Medium natural animate (undead) — XP 175 each

HP 55; **Bloodied** 27 — **Initiative** +6
AC 18, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 14 — **Perception** +3
Speed 6 (8 when charging) — Darkvision
Immune disease, poison

Traits

Flesh-Crazed Charge
While the zombie is charging, its movement does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Zombie Weakness
A critical hit automatically reduces the zombie to 0 hit points.

Standard Actions

Club ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 6 damage, or 2d8 + 6 if the zombie charged the target.

Bite ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the zombie's next turn.

Triggered Actions

Deathless Hunger ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The zombie is reduced to 0 hit points, but not by a critical hit.
Effect (No Action): Roll a d20. On a 15 or higher, the zombie is instead reduced to 1 hit point.

Str 18 (+6) **Dex** 15 (+4) **Wis** 13 (+3)
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 1 (-3) **Cha** 3 (-2)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** –
Equipment club

4 Wraith Figments (W) Level 6 Minion Skirmisher	
Medium shadow humanoid (undead)	XP 63 each
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +7	
AC 18, **Fortitude** 16, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 17	**Perception** +2
Speed fly 6 (hover); phasing	Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Shadow Caress** (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 7 necrotic damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the wraith's next turn.	
Move Actions	
Shadow Glide ✦ **Encounter**	
Effect: The wraith figment shifts up to 6 squares.	
Skills Stealth +10	
Str 3 (-2) **Dex** 17 (+5) **Wis** 10 (+2)	
Con 13 (+3) **Int** 4 (-1) **Cha** 15 (+4)	
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** –	

Stairs: This set of stairs, long since rotted to nothing in the natural world, leads upward into the tower (and Encounter S4).

Treasure: A tiny chest, found in a pile of rubbish, contains 300 gp worth of *residuum* and two *potions of healing*.

Tactics: The zombies hurl themselves at targets of opportunity; their limited intelligence is unable to formulate a more cohesive strategy. The wraiths make full use of their phasing ability to strike unexpectedly by moving and retreating through walls, picking on one character apiece.

Nadir pops from room to room, raining shrill curses and attacks upon those who would dare invade his master's sanctum. The butler is so overcome with anger and protective instinct that he grabs several unlabeled vials and hurls them at the party members, clueless about what their contents will do but heedless of the danger. He retains enough sense and tactical savvy to target adventurers he judges to be the most threatening or vulnerable. Anyone who causes harm to his master's possessions (intentionally or through bursts or blasts) earns his special attention.

S4. Evard's Shadow

Combat Encounter Level 6 (1,400 XP)

Evard's shadow lurks in the mansion's dilapidated observatory, where he works to corrupt the manse's warding rituals. The degradation of those rituals enables the shadow to funnel dark energy into the natural world while it waits for the perfect planar alignment to force a cataclysmic shadowfall.

A character who succeeds on a DC 20 Perception check notices that not every shadow in the room moves the way it should. Two patches flit about of their own accord.

Light: Dim light (magical).

Monsters: 1 shadow strangler (E), 2 shadow stalkers (S), 4 hex knights (K).

As the characters reach the top of the stairs, read:

The cramped stairs open onto a sizable chamber, several times larger than the tower's exterior dimensions should allow. Its ceiling opens to the eternal night sky above. A tarnished and tattered array of interconnected rings, discs, and spheres cast from bronze and etched in silver dominates the center of the space.

A robed figure stares upward at the metallic maze from the far end of the chamber—or rather, his shadow does; the man is nowhere to be seen. Behind the disembodied shadow, a floating quill scratches across a parchment sheet in time with its waving hand.

A group of diminutive, well-armed guards stands ready around the room.

A character who makes a successful DC 10 Arcana check identifies the mass of interwoven bronze to be an orrery, a device used to track the complicated dance of the cosmos. On a successful DC 14 Arcana check or History check, an adventurer realizes that the disembodied shadow bears a striking resemblance to the legendary Evard.

The shadow strangler is indeed the animated, cast-off, and imprisoned shadow of the great nethermancer who built this place. Over the long and lonely years, its fractured memories have convinced the unstable phantom that it is the original Evard, and that it was trapped here by the hateful populace of the mortal world.

The stalkers begin the encounter hidden; place them on the map if they are spotted by a character or when they move to attack.

Orrery: The orrery is too high above the floor to drastically affect combat. Its enormous support pillar is blocking terrain, however, and a handful of its arms (depicted on the tactical map) hang low enough to provide partial cover and require an additional square of movement to scramble over.

Treasure: An uncommon level 8 item, a common level 5 item, and three uncut moonstones (worth 100 gp each), which are found holding down a ragged sheet of parchment.

Tactics: Evard's shadow (the shadow strangler) holds nothing back. Furious at the intrusion, it launches its most powerful attacks and lashes out at those who would disturb its great work. Far from haphazard, it employs its powers to their best effect in a display of tactical brilliance inherited from the original Evard.

The hex knights move to protect their master, using their slowing abilities to hobble characters who try to engage the shadow in melee. They use *shadow hex* on the most dangerous-looking foes, both to shield their master and to ease its revenge if someone presumes to attack it despite the mark.

The stalkers follow a simpler plan. They target an isolated character, latch onto his or her shadow with *shadow stalk*, and use *shadow touch* on their prey until it drops. If a character saves against *shadow stalk*, the shadow looks for an opportunity to trigger *shadow step*, disengaging and hiding if necessary.

Shadow Strangler (E) **Level 9 Artillery**
Medium shadow humanoid XP 400

HP 53; **Bloodied** 26 **Initiative** +8
AC 23, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 22 **Perception** +6
Speed 8 Darkvision
Resist insubstantial; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant

Traits

Born of Shadows
The strangler can make a Stealth check to become hidden when it has concealment instead of needing total concealment.

Standard Actions

Shadowy Touch (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + 5 necrotic damage, and the strangler becomes invisible to the target until the end of the strangler's next turn.

Blinding Shadows (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +14 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + 5 necrotic damage, and the target cannot see anything more than 3 squares away from it until the end of the strangler's next turn.

Strangling Darkness (necrotic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +14 vs. Fortitude
Hit: The target is restrained and takes ongoing 15 necrotic damage (save ends both).

Devouring Dark (necrotic) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (enemies in burst); +14 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d10 + 7 necrotic damage, and the target is blinded until the end of the strangler's next turn.
Miss: Half damage.

Skills Arcana +10, Stealth +13
Str 12 (+5) **Dex** 19 (+8) **Wis** 14 (+6)
Con 17 (+7) **Int** 12 (+5) **Cha** 19 (+8)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common

As long as the shadow strangler is alive, the monsters continue to fight. If it falls, a bloodied dark one or shadow will flee.

2 Shadow Stalkers (S) **Level 3 Lurker**
Medium shadow humanoid XP 150 each

HP 25; **Bloodied** 12 **Initiative** +9
AC 15, **Fortitude** 14, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 14 **Perception** +3
Speed 8 Darkvision
Resist insubstantial; **Vulnerable** 5 radiant

Traits

Born of Shadows
The stalker can make a Stealth check to become hidden when it has concealment instead of needing total concealment.

Standard Actions

Shadowy Touch (necrotic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +6 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d8 + 6 necrotic damage.

Shadow Stalk (necrotic) ✦ **Recharge** when the stalker uses *shadow step*
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +8 vs. Reflex
Hit: 1d6 + 8 necrotic damage, and the stalker shifts into the target's space and melds with its shadow (save ends). While the stalker is melded with the target's shadow, it moves when the target moves without provoking opportunity attacks, and it gains a +4 bonus to all defenses and a +5 bonus to attack rolls against the target. When the target saves, the stalker shifts to a square adjacent to the target.

Triggered Actions

Shadow Step (teleportation) ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: A living creature within 5 squares of the stalker drops to 0 hit points or fewer.
Effect (Free Action): The stalker teleports to a square adjacent to the triggering creature and gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls until the end of its next turn.

Skills Stealth +10
Str 12 (+2) **Dex** 19 (+5) **Wis** 14 (+3)
Con 13 (+2) **Int** 12 (+2) **Cha** 11 (+1)
Alignment evil **Languages** Common

4 Hex Knights (K)	Level 4 Soldier
Small shadow humanoid, dark one	XP 175 each
HP 54; **Bloodied** 27	**Initiative** +7
AC 20, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 15	**Perception** +3
Speed 6	Darkvision

Standard Actions

Short Sword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The hex knight makes the following attack twice.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of the hex knight's next turn.

Hand Crossbow (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 10/20 (one creature); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage.

Vicious Flurry (weapon) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Melee 1 (one or two creatures); +9 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 4 damage, and the target is slowed and takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends both).

Move Actions

Dark Step ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The hex knight moves 4 squares, gains a +4 bonus to AC against opportunity attacks provoked by this movement, and gains combat advantage against each creature that it ends its move adjacent to until the end of the hex knight's next turn.

Minor Actions

Shadow Hex ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: One creature within 3 squares of the hex knight is marked until the end of the encounter or until the hex knight uses *shadow hex* again. While the creature is marked by the hex knight, whenever it makes an attack that does not include the hex knight as a target, it grants combat advantage until the end of its next turn.

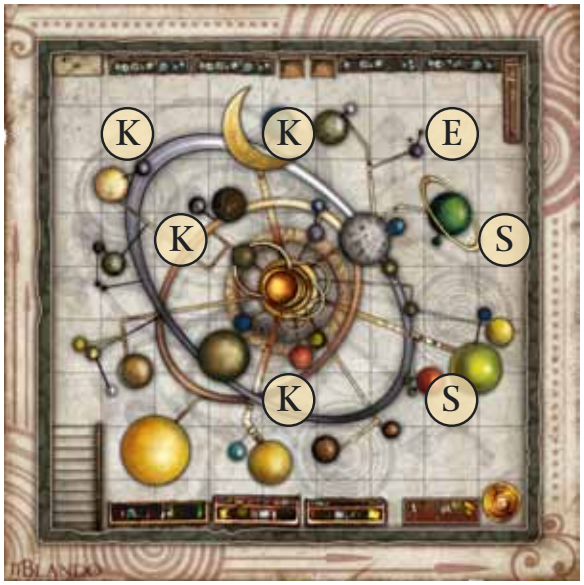
Triggered Actions

Killing Dark
Trigger: The hex knight drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (No Action): Each enemy adjacent to the hex knight is blinded until the end of his or her next turn.

Skills Athletics +9, Stealth +10

Str 15 (+4)	**Dex** 16 (+5)	**Wis** 12 (+3)
Con 14 (+4)	**Int** 11 (+2)	**Cha** 11 (+2)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment hide armor, 2 short swords, hand crossbow, 10 bolts



Aftermath

With Evard's shadow defeated, the wards wrought by the original Evard can once again reinforce the natural weak point between the planes. The spreading pall of despair that bled from the Shadowfell into the world lifts with the following dawn, burned off like a morning fog.

With the protective enchantments back in place, the characters can return to the material world by touching the crystal in the study; the transition holds no danger for them. However, the reestablishment of the wards seals off the magical loophole behind them, meaning that the adventurers can no longer use it to return to the Shadowfell. Of course, it's always possible that something might reopen a means of moving between the worlds. When or how that might happen is an adventure for another time.

About the Author

Daniel Marthaler is a writer, primarily for D&D Insider, whose credits include the adventures *Sunderpeak Temple*, *Lord of the White Field*, and *Legacy of Io*.

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Scarred for Life

A Chaos Scar Adventure

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Introduction

An infamous, scarred outlaw has come out of hiding to resolve his strange connection to the Chaos Scar. The heroes must decide whether to bring the outlaw to long-deserved justice, or cooperate with him to lift an ancient curse.

"Scarred for Life" is a Dungeons & Dragons® Chaos Scar adventure for characters of levels 7–9. You can change the names of personalities and places to suit your own campaign.

Background

Four hundred years ago, a meteor collided with the world and left a nasty gash across the face of the Nentir Vale. Unbeknownst to anyone, the meteor also carried a passenger. An ancient beholder thought that it could hitch a ride on the meteor and touch down on a new world ripe for conquest. To survive the long journey, the beholder wrapped itself in a protective coating of crystal (using a unique version of the Stasis Shell ritual, presented in *Dragon* 366) and rode the meteor through the depths of space.

Unfortunately for the beholder, a fragment of its crystal shell broke off as the meteor entered the atmosphere. The fragment struck a young man named Keljack, scarring him. Because the beholder's shell was now not complete, the creature was unable to break free of its crystal prison. It lies in wait for the day when the shard that is part of Keljack is reunited with the rest of the crystal shell.

In the meantime, destiny has not been kind to Keljack. Although the crystal fragment gifted Keljack with great longevity, his life has been filled with hardship and misfortune because of the disfigurement. That's about to change.

Now a well-known outlaw, Keljack recently discovered that his body is infused with energy similar to that coming from a particular area of the Chaos Scar. He traveled to the outskirts of the Scar and tried to pinpoint the source of the energy. Though he could feel the location of the stasis crystal dimly, he knew the Scar was too dangerous for him to venture any farther into it by himself. As he returned from this journey back to the Nentir Vale, he rescued an ogre named Fool from a pack of mutated beasts, and the two became fast friends.

Keljack has resolved to undertake an expedition deeper into the Scar, and to attract hirelings he has spread word of a grand treasure hunt. He and Fool are going to meet with a pair of notable bandit leaders and decide which of those groups best suits their needs.

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Synopsis

While traveling between Fallcrest and Restwell Keep, the adventurers stop at the Quarter Moon Inn. They encounter Keljack and Fool in the middle of negotiating with two groups of bandits, and the talks are going poorly. The heroes can attempt to apprehend Keljack, or they can join him on his "treasure hunt."

Keljack and Fool lead the adventurers into the Scar; the characters might be pursing them, or they might all be traveling together. Either way, the heroes must contend with servants of the trapped beholder before arriving at the stasis crystal.

In the final encounter, Keljack's proximity to the beholder finally releases the creature from the crystal. The adventurers must prevail over the beholder before deciding Keljack's ultimate fate.

Getting the Characters Involved

When the adventure starts, the heroes find themselves in one of two situations.

Hook 1: Meeting the Blades

Some inexperienced adventurers calling themselves Bathram's Blades are at the Nentir Inn in Fallcrest celebrating their return from their first expedition into the Chaos Scar. Between drunken tales of their exploits, the Blades talk about the close call they had with the outlaw Keljack and his new ogre sidekick, Fool. The two were seen on the southern edge of the King's Wall about a week ago as the Blades traveled away from the Scar, and they might still be in the area. Someone suggests that the Quarter Moon Inn, on the road between Fallcrest and Restwell Keep, gets a lot of traffic to and from the Scar, so it would be a good place to go for more information.

If you're using this hook, the Blades can impart any of the commonly held beliefs about Keljack (see below) if any character makes a successful DC 12 Streetwise check.

Hook 2: Action at the Inn

The heroes are passing by the Quarter Moon Inn and decide to stop for a meal at the moment Keljack is concluding his negotiations inside with two groups of bandits.

If you're using this hook, the adventure starts without any prelude, and the characters learn about Keljack and his situation as the plot unfolds.

Keljack

Keljack is well known throughout the Nentir Vale and the lands surrounding the Chaos Scar. Bandit leader, outlaw, mercenary—Keljack has been all of these things and more.

Bards say he was birthed from the egg of a red dragon, yet appears human. The scar that mars his face grants him immense power, they say. Unequaled in skill with a longsword, he never draws first and never attacks without warning. Many people in the Nentir Vale consider Keljack a celebrity, even as they fear his presence. He is a man whom people love to hate, even if his reputation far surpasses his actual abilities.

The truth is far less colorful. Keljack, born Kellem Jackson, was a teenager when the meteor that caused the Chaos Scar passed overhead. A fragment of the beholder's stasis shell broke off as the meteor entered the atmosphere, and that sliver struck Kellem in the face. He survived, but the fragment transferred its magic into Kellem's body and left him bearing a large, vivid scar. Those who looked upon him immediately afterward saw his disfigurement, coinciding as it did with the meteor's arrival, as an ill omen, and he was ostracized.

Bitter and angry, Kellem resolved that if people were going to curse his name, they would do so because of his deeds and not because of his disfigurement. He stole his father's longsword, joined a local bandit gang, and never looked back. Wanting no connection with the hapless farmer he had once been, he changed his name to Keljack and embarked on a career of banditry and terror.

For reasons Keljack doesn't understand, he suffers periodic bouts of madness. When he comes to his senses, his body is rejuvenated and revitalized, but his skills are rusty from disuse. What he doesn't realize is that the magic of the shard that struck him is keeping him from aging, but at the same time that sliver is tainted by its connection to the beholder—it imbues Keljack with a healthy dose of the beholder's own insanity and paranoia. As the shard keeps him young, it also regularly drives him insane.

During his periods of lucidity, Keljack returns to and remains in the Nentir Vale. He has found that the farther removed he is from the Chaos Scar, the more easily he can stave off the madness. Even so, the bouts of insanity are lasting longer and longer, and he wonders if the day might come when he never regains his senses.

Recently, Keljack ambushed a wandering scholar in search of loot. The woman had no valuables, but she escaped with her life and health by telling the outlaw something he had never heard before: Magic emanated from Keljack, and it was similar to the energy that her fellow scholars had detected deep within the southern forest of the Chaos Scar.

Keljack suspected this energy was related to his madness, so he traveled to the Scar to find the truth. Even though he sensed the stasis crystal somewhere ahead of him, he realized that he was no match for the monsters of the Scar and turned back. On his way

out, he saved the life of the ogre named Fool, and the two quickly became friends.

Now, Keljack and Fool are at the Quarter Moon Inn to meet with prospective hirelings. Keljack feels that another bout of insanity is fast approaching, and this upcoming expedition could be his last chance to find out the truth about himself before he loses his mind once more.

Keljack	**Level 8 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, human	XP 350
HP 85; **Bloodied** 42	**Initiative** +11
AC 22, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 21	**Perception** +3
Speed 6	

Traits

Half-Remembered Swordplay

Whenever Keljack hits an enemy that is granting combat advantage to him, he also imposes a random effect on that enemy. Roll a d4:

1. The enemy is dazed (save ends).
2. The enemy is immobilized (save ends).
3. The enemy is slowed (save ends).
4. The enemy takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Standard Actions

⊕ **Longsword** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC

Hit: 2d8 + 7 damage.

⸸ **Fumbled Footwork** ✦ **At-Will**

Effect: Keljack shifts up to 1d6 + 2 squares away from his starting position and uses *longsword* at any point during the move.

Triggered Actions

Left-Handed Parry ✦ **Recharge** ⚅ ⚄ ⚃

Trigger: Keljack is hit by a melee or a ranged attack.

Effect (Immediate Interrupt): Roll a d20. On a 10 or higher, the triggering attack misses.

Skills Athletics +12, Bluff +12, Diplomacy +12

Str 16 (+7)	**Dex** 20 (+9)	**Wis** 9 (+3)
Con 13 (+5)	**Int** 10 (+4)	**Cha** 17 (+7)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common

Equipment leather armor, longsword, *potion of healing*

Fool

This ogre is exceptionally intelligent. As he grew to adulthood and realized how different he was from the other ogres in his tribe, he decided to conceal his intelligence and act the part of a dimwit. Some time ago, his tribe came under the dominion of a red dragon named Maluriath, who had been corrupted by the chaotic energy of a *Deck of Many Things*. The dragon named the ogres after the various cards in the deck, and this particular ogre was dubbed "Fool."

Unlike the other ogres, Fool was smart enough to see that the dragon cared not for the tribe but only for itself. Determined to get his tribe out from under the dragon's rule, he escaped and set out looking for help. As he reached the fringe of the Chaos Scar, he was attacked by monsters that threatened to end his quest before it could begin. Keljack was nearby when this assault occurred, and he helped Fool dispatch the monsters.

When Keljack saved Fool's life, Fool couldn't believe his good fortune. Though his tribe hails from deep within the Chaos Scar, Fool had heard stories of Keljack from travelers over the years. If anyone could defeat the dragon and free his people, it would be this man. He agreed to help Keljack solve the mystery of his scar and Keljack, in turn, agreed to help him vanquish the dragon afterward.

Fool is in no way a stereotypical ogre. Smart, analytical, and difficult to anger, he tries to plan for every contingency. He maintains a "dumb ogre" facade, even away from his tribe, when dealing with those he doesn't know. Never very social, Fool has found in Keljack something he never expected when he fled his tribe: a friend.

Fool	**Level 8 Soldier**
Large natural humanoid (giant), ogre	XP 350
HP 93; **Bloodied** 46	**Initiative** +8
AC 24, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 19	**Perception** +6
Speed 8	

Traits

Master of Escape

Fool can make saving throws against immobilized, restrained, and slowed effects at the start as well as at the end of his turn, even if the effect doesn't normally end on a save.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Morningstar** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +13 vs. AC

Hit: 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target is slowed until the end of Fool's next turn.

⸸ ⚒ **Handaxe** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**

Attack: Melee 2 (one creature) or Ranged 5 (one creature); +13 vs. AC

Hit: 1d8 + 7 damage, and the target falls prone.

Triggered Actions

Last One Standing ✦ **Encounter**

Trigger: An attack damages Fool while he is bloodied.

Effect (Immediate Interrupt): Fool gains 10 temporary hit points.

Skills Thievery +11

Str 22 (+10)	**Dex** 15 (+6)	**Wis** 15 (+6)
Con 21 (+9)	**Int** 20 (+9)	**Cha** 8 (+3)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Giant

Equipment 5 handaxes, morningstar, *potion of healing*

The Beholder

At first, the beholder railed against its imprisonment. The stasis shell that kept it alive during its journey on the meteor now keeps it trapped until the missing shard can be reunited with the rest of the crystal. Through years of experimentation, the beholder figured out how to extend a small amount of its power beyond the crystal's confines. Unwilling to become a curio in some wizard's tower, the beholder dominated monsters and explorers that uncovered its resting place, and it used those captive creatures to ward off other snoopers. Its latest conquest is a small pack of gnolls.

The beholder sensed when Keljack neared the Scar on his first expedition, and along the connection between itself and Keljack, it was able to perceive an image of the outlaw. Now most of its gnolls roam the Scar under specific orders to capture Keljack and bring him to the crystal.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The outcome of this adventure hinges on the adventurers' interactions (or lack thereof) with Keljack and Fool. Roleplay Keljack and Fool to the hilt, especially in **Encounter 1: Delicate Negotiations**, so the adventurers have an opportunity to form their own opinions of the two outlaws.

Price on Their Heads

Faren Markelhay, Lord Warden of Fallcrest, is out to make a name for himself. Capturing Keljack would be a triumph for his political career, for the peace of the Nentir Vale, and for justice. He knows that going after Keljack personally would be foolhardy, especially since the outlaw has been seen with an ogre recently. But he's pretty sure that raising the bounty on both of those outlaws will attract the talent needed to bring them in.

Wanted posters (see below) are displayed prominently at inns and taverns throughout Fallcrest and the Nentir Vale. The accusations leveled at Keljack are largely true, though perhaps embellished by the passage of time. The accusations against Fool are entirely fabricated, but to the Lord Warden, they seem like crimes an ogre would commit.

Keljack

By the order of the Lord Warden of Fallcrest, the outlaw Keljack—known for the prominent and distinctive scar across his face, and being of moderate height and surly disposition—is wanted alive! He has pillaged, murdered, and committed a sundry host of villainous shenanigans too numerous to list. Any who deliver Keljack alive to Fallcrest will be paid the sum of 3,000 gold pieces.

Fool

By the order of the Lord Warden of Fallcrest, an ogre calling himself Fool, known to wield a morningstar and a handaxe, and also known to travel in the company of Keljack the outlaw, is wanted alive! He has committed murder, destroyed property, and stolen sheep. Any who deliver this ogre alive to Fallcrest will receive the sum of 600 gold pieces.

COMPANION CHARACTERS

Keljack and Fool might accompany the adventurers on some of this adventure's encounters. If they do so, give the players control of their actions in combat, using the provided statistics blocks. For more information about companion characters, see *Dungeon Master's Guide 2*, pages 27-33.

Encounter Summary

Read the following section before beginning play to familiarize yourself with how the adventure flows. Once the encounters begin, each one leads directly into the next.

When you're done with the summary, begin the adventure with **Encounter 1: Delicate Negotiations**.

The Quarter Moon Inn

Between Fallcrest and Restwell Keep lies the Quarter Moon Inn, a roadside tavern and way station run by the halfling brothers Heller and Mir Halfmoon (cousins of Selarund Halfmoon in Fallcrest). Famed for its pies, both savory and sweet, the inn is a popular stopping point for travelers.

Whether the adventurers track down Keljack and Fool (hook 1) or you use the outlaw duo as a chance encounter (hook 2), the adventurers come upon them in the inn as the two outlaws meet with a pair of bandit leaders.

Following a Feeling

Traveling through the Chaos Scar is neither safe nor easy. Accompanied by or in pursuit of Keljack, the adventurers must avoid the dangers of the Scar and the beholder's forces as they make their way to the vast forest along the Scar's southern border.

These events lead up to **Encounter 2: Into the Scar.**

The Stream Crossing

About a mile from the stasis crystal, the party comes to a fast-running stream beneath a beaver dam. Part of the stream is shallow enough to cross, but the beholder's servants, gnolls and their trained owlbears, watch the crossing, ready to take advantage of the terrain to isolate and devour travelers.

These events lead up to **Encounter 3: The Stream.**

The Ancient Forest

Beyond the stream, the forest takes on a primeval look. The trees become larger, blotting out the sun, and the ground sinks into shallow swampland. The beholder's stasis crystal landed here as the meteor tore its way into the Scar. Energy bleeding from the crystal has preserved this section of the forest as it was when the crystal landed.

After the heroes have crossed or circumvented the stream, the adventure ends with **Encounter 4: An End to Madness.**

Encounter 1: Delicate Negotiations

Encounter Level 9+ (2,100+ XP)

Setup

Keljack (K)
Fool (M)
Char, tiefling occultist (O)
Flip, gnome illusionist (G)
3 tiefling furies (F)
3 gnome assassins (A)

Keljack is negotiating with two small-time bandit groups—Char's Furies and Flip's Shadows—for who should have the privilege of accompanying him to his "treasure." He thought to play one group off the other and gain a favorable cut of whatever is found within the Scar, but the negotiations have hit an impasse. Fabulous treasure is supposedly at stake, and neither group wants to allow the other to leave with Keljack. When the adventurers make their entrance, everything changes.

As the adventurers approach the Quarter Moon Inn, read:
The Quarter Moon Inn looks busy today. Four strong horses are tethered out front, and chatter drifts through the doorway and windows.

The adventurers notice the wanted posters for Keljack and Fool plastered on a board outside the tavern. If they look around further, they can find a rear door and two more horses, around back. A second story has bedrooms where travelers can spend the night and windows that can be opened without difficulty. (The owners of the Quarter Moon, the halfling brothers Heller and Mir, are hiding in the kitchen until Keljack leaves, praying he doesn't wreck the place.)

If the adventurers look in a window, so that they can see and hear Keljack and Fool, read:
A man with a scarred face is playing cards with a tiefling and a gnome. An ogre sits by himself at a nearby table and sneers at the others.

Allow the adventurers to be creative in planning their entrance to the inn. The outlaws have a passive Perception of 15 for noticing any sneaking or subterfuge.

If the adventurers enter openly, Keljack greets them with a smile: The adventurers are just the type of people he seeks. He tries to use his reputation to convince the adventurers to help them find his "treasure." His paranoia is hard at work, and already he doesn't trust either Char or Flip.

If the characters are persuaded to accompany Keljack and Fool, Char and Flip become enraged. They forge a temporary truce and gang up on the adventurers.

If the adventurers try to put Keljack under arrest or if they charge into the tavern, Char and Flip fight to cover Keljack's escape with the hope of rejoining him later.

Tactics

If the heroes have come to arrest them, Keljack and Fool attempt to flee as soon as possible and in any available direction—out the doors, through the windows, or up the stairs—though neither leaves the other behind if he appears incapable of following. Keljack steals a horse, trusting Fool's natural speed to keep up. They each have a *potion of healing*.

If the adventurers plan to accompany Keljack, he and Fool fight on their side against the other bandits.

Fool's preferred tactic, in either situation, is to cut the chandelier with a thrown handaxe and send it

crashing down upon his enemies. For details on how to accomplish this, see the chandelier terrain power on page 8.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light. It's around noon, with plenty of sunshine.

Bar: The bottles of alcohol behind the bar can be used as one-handed improvised ranged or melee weapons. A bottle breaks after use, spreading flammable alcohol in the square where it landed. If that square is included in a fire attack, flames burn there until the end of the encounter. Any creature that starts its turn there takes 1d8 fire damage.

Chandelier: The chandelier hangs by a stout rope. A character adjacent to or beneath the chandelier can use it to swing over the battle. With a DC 15 Acrobatics check, an adventurer can move up to 4 squares.

Doors: The front doors swing in both directions. The back door opens outward. A door can be broken with a DC 13 Strength check.

Horses: The horses out front were ridden here by Char and his gang. The ones out back belong to Flip and the gnomes (who rode in two to a mount).

Windows: The windows are large enough to pass through. They begin closed, and they can be broken as part of a move action with a DC 10 Strength check or as part of forced movement.

Stairs Up: The large, open staircase leads up to the second floor. The stairs are difficult terrain.

Stairs Down: Narrow stone steps lead to a 10-by-10-foot lower chamber that serves as a root cellar.

Tables: The tables in the Quarter Moon provide partial cover whether they are upright or not. A table can be tipped over with a DC 10 Strength check.

Treasure: The bandits have 500 gp from recent robberies plus two *potions of healing*. Dead or alive, Char and Flip are worth 50 gp each in Fallcrest.

Development

If Keljack and Fool flee, they head for the Scar. Keljack is desperate now, betting that he and Fool alone can make it to the source of the strange energy. In any case, he feels he has to try before the madness overtakes him once more.

If Keljack and the adventurers team up, the outlaw leads the entire group into the Scar.

In either case, proceed with **Encounter 2: Into the Scar**.

DEAD OR ALIVE?

If the adventurers capture Keljack and Fool, the two outlaws do their best to convince the adventurers to help them solve the mystery of Keljack's scar. Keljack lies, persuades, and makes outlandish promises if he thinks it will do him any good; he has about 4,000 gp hidden in various locations around the Nentir Vale, though he'd rather not give it all up at once.

Fool, for his part, talks of his enslaved tribe and argues cogently (dropping, whenever convenient, the "dumb ogre" act) for his and Keljack's release.

If the heroes insist on holding the outlaws captive, Fool's ability to get out of certain kinds of restraining effects could come into play. If Keljack and the ogre manage to win free, the adventure continues just as it would have if the outlaws had escaped the inn.

If the adventurers are determined and skilled enough to keep Keljack and Fool under arrest, later to be hanged for their crimes, it is ultimately up to you if the story of Keljack ends here.

3 Gnome Assassins (A) **Level 7 Skirmisher**
Small fey humanoid XP 300 each

HP 78; **Bloodied** 39 **Initiative** +9
AC 21, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 19 **Perception** +9
Speed 5 Low-light vision

Standard Actions

Katar (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 8 damage, or 4d6 + 8 if the attack ended the gnome's *shade form*.

Move Actions

Shadow Step (teleportation) ✦ **At-Will**
Requirement: The gnome must be adjacent to a creature.
Effect: The gnome teleports up to 3 squares to a square adjacent to a different creature, and any mark on the gnome ends.

Minor Actions

Shade Form ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Effect: The gnome assumes a shadowy form that lasts until it makes an attack roll or until the end of its next turn. While in this form, it is insubstantial and has vulnerable 5 radiant. In addition, it can make Stealth checks to become hidden if it has any cover or concealment.
Sustain Minor: The shadowy form persists until the end of the gnome's next turn.

Skills Stealth +12

Str 10 (+3)	**Dex** 19 (+7)	**Wis** 13 (+4)
Con 14 (+5)	**Int** 14 (+5)	**Cha** 16 (+6)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Equipment leather armor, 2 katars

Flip, Gnome Illusionist (G) **Level 6 Artillery**
Small fey humanoid XP 250

HP 57; **Bloodied** 28 **Initiative** +5
AC 20, **Fortitude** 15, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 18 **Perception** +4
Speed 5 Low-light vision

Standard Actions

Gnarled Staff (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 6 damage.

Bedazzle (illusion, implement, radiant) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +11 vs. Will
Hit: 2d6 + 5 radiant damage, and the target grants combat advantage (save ends).

See Me Not (illusion, implement, psychic) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Close blast 3 (enemies in the blast); +9 vs. Will
Hit: 2d6 + 10 psychic damage, and the target cannot see the gnome (save ends).

Move Actions

There, Not There (illusion, teleportation) ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: The gnome teleports up to 5 squares and creates two duplicates of itself within 5 squares of its destination space. The duplicates last until the gnome attacks or until they are destroyed. Each duplicate has 1 hit point and the same ability scores and defenses as the gnome. The gnome can use its actions to have a duplicate act in any way it could, except that the duplicates cannot use powers and cannot flank.

Minor Actions

Veil (illusion) ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The gnome can disguise itself and up to three allies within 5 squares of it to appear as any Small or Medium creatures. A creature can see through the disguise with a successful Insight check opposed by the gnome's Bluff check.

Skills Bluff +13, Stealth +12

Str 10 (+3)	**Dex** 14 (+5)	**Wis** 13 (+4)
Con 15 (+5)	**Int** 18 (+7)	**Cha** 20 (+8)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common, Elven
Equipment robes, gnarled staff (quarterstaff)

3 Tiefling Furies (F) **Level 5 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid XP 200 each

HP 63; **Bloodied** 31 **Initiative** +4
AC 21, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 18 **Perception** +2
Speed 6 Low-light vision
Resist 10 fire

Standard Actions

Longsword (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +10 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 8 damage.
Effect: The tiefling marks the target until the end of the target's next turn.

Triggered Actions

Tail Trip ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy marked by the tiefling shifts.
Attack (Immediate Interrupt): Melee 1 (triggering enemy); +10 vs. Reflex
Hit: The target falls prone, and the tiefling uses *longsword* against it.

Defiant Curse ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy hits the tiefling.
Effect (Free Action): Close burst 10 (triggering enemy in the burst). The tiefling marks the target until the end of the target's next turn.

Skills Bluff +10, Stealth +7
Str 16 (+5) **Dex** 11 (+2) **Wis** 10 (+2)
Con 15 (+4) **Int** 14 (+4) **Cha** 16 (+5)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment leather armor, longsword

Char, Tiefling Occultist (O) **Level 8 Controller**
Medium natural humanoid XP 350

HP 87; **Bloodied** 43 **Initiative** +4
AC 22, **Fortitude** 18, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 22 **Perception** +5
Speed 6 Low-light vision
Resist 10 fire

Standard Actions

Hell Rod (fire, implement) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + 6 fire damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends)

Soul Fire (fear, fire, implement, psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Area burst 1 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +11 vs. Reflex
Hit: Ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends). In addition, the first time the target willingly moves closer to the tiefling before the end of its next turn, the target takes 10 psychic damage.
Miss: Ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).

Move Actions

Baleful Teleport (teleportation) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Effect: Before the attack, the tiefling teleports up to 10 squares.
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +11 vs. Will
Hit: The tiefling teleports the target 10 squares to the square it just left.

Triggered Actions

Fiery Transposition (fire, teleportation) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: An enemy hits the tiefling.
Effect (Immediate Interrupt): Close burst 3 (creatures in the burst). Each target takes 5 fire damage, and then the tiefling and the triggering enemy teleport, swapping positions.

Skills Bluff +14, Stealth +9
Str 10 (+4) **Dex** 11 (+4) **Wis** 13 (+5)
Con 15 (+6) **Int** 17 (+7) **Cha** 20 (+9)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment leather armor, rod

Chandelier **Single-Use Terrain**

A large, ornate chandelier of iron and crystal hangs over the battlefield. It would be a pity if it fell to the ground.

Standard Action
Check: From a distance, to sever or loosen the rope or chain holding the chandelier aloft, make a ranged attack (the chandelier's defenses are 14).
Alternatively, you can spend a standard action to cut the rope while adjacent to either the chandelier or the rope or chain keeping it aloft.
Success: The chandelier falls to the ground and smashes to pieces.
Target: Each creature in an area burst 1 beneath the chandelier
Attack: +12 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 4 damage.
Miss: Half damage.
Effect: The area where the chandelier fell becomes difficult terrain.

Encounter 2: Into the Scar

Encounter Level 6 (1,000 XP)

In this skill challenge, the adventurers must avoid the dangerous monsters that rove the Scar while helping Keljack locate the crystal or following his trail.

Skill Challenge

Level: 6 (1,000 XP).

Complexity: 4 (requires 10 successes before 3 failures).

Time Frame: Unless otherwise noted, each adventurer can make a check in this challenge once per day.

Primary Skills: Arcana, Dungeoneering, History, Nature, Stealth.

Arcana (DC 23, three successes maximum): If Keljack is with the party, the character boosts Keljack's ability to detect the stasis crystal through other magical emanations that pervade the Scar. Or if Keljack is being pursued, the character detects and follows the energy coming from him.

Dungeoneering (DC 23, four successes maximum): If Keljack is with the party, the character knows that many of the Scar's inhabitants have been warped and twisted by the presence of the meteor, and he or she can predict the creatures' preferred hunting grounds and behavioral patterns. Or if Keljack is being pursued, the character can perceive the effect of the strange energy associated with the meteor, and creatures of the Far Realm, before they are encountered.

History (DC 15, two successes maximum): The character recalls tales of other adventurers who have explored this area of the Chaos Scar. Although the stories are not current, they help the party avoid the area's known threats. A result of 23 or higher on this check counts as two successes instead of one. If the adventurers earn both successes possible, they can then use Heal as a secondary skill in the challenge.

Nature (DC 15, three successes maximum): The character understands clues—markings on trees, the scarcity of other wildlife, distinctive droppings—that indicate that the adventurers are entering a dangerous creature's territory well before they encounter the creature.

Stealth (DC 15, four successes maximum): The character scouts ahead, determining the safest route through the area, or conceals the party's tracks. A character who gets a result of 23 or higher on this check can choose to remove a failure in the challenge rather than counting this result as a success.

Secondary Skills: Heal, Perception.

Heal (DC 23, usable only after two successful History checks): The character helps an ally fight off stress and exhaustion, granting the ally a +2 bonus to his or her next check in the challenge.

Perception (DC 15): The character notices tracks or dangerous creatures before the adventurers are spotted in turn, granting a +2 bonus to the next Nature check or Stealth check made in the challenge.

Special: Insight.

Insight (DC 23): If the characters are traveling with Keljack, he becomes increasingly impatient and paranoid as the journey progresses. With a successful Insight check, a character discerns and reveals to the outlaw that Keljack's actions are being influenced by an outside source related to the Far Realm. This knowledge makes Keljack redouble his efforts to see this quest through: The outlaw gains a +2 bonus to all attack rolls until the end of the adventure.

Success: The adventurers navigate the dangers of the Scar to arrive in the area of the stasis crystal. If the adventurers are pursuing Keljack, they arrive close behind him.

Failure: The party is attacked by a group of gnolls in service to the trapped beholder. The gnolls have orders to capture Keljack and bring him to the stasis crystal (if he is present), or to kill any who approach the area of the crystal (if Keljack is traveling ahead of the characters).

The gnolls include 2 blackfang feasters, 2 blackfang gravediggers, and 1 blackfang howler (1,200 XP, level 6 encounter, *Monster Vault: Threats to the Nentir Vale*).

Treasure: None.

Development

Proceed to **Encounter 3: The Stream**.

Encounter 3: The Stream

Encounter Level 8+ (1,850+ XP)

Setup

3 gnoll far fangs
1 gnoll pack lord
3 trained owlbears

Keljack knows that the source of his feeling is in the primeval forest beyond the stream. The adventurers arrive here in his company, or close behind him, depending on their actions throughout the adventure.

The gnoll pack lord and the third trained owlbear are present only if the adventurers accompany Keljack and Fool.

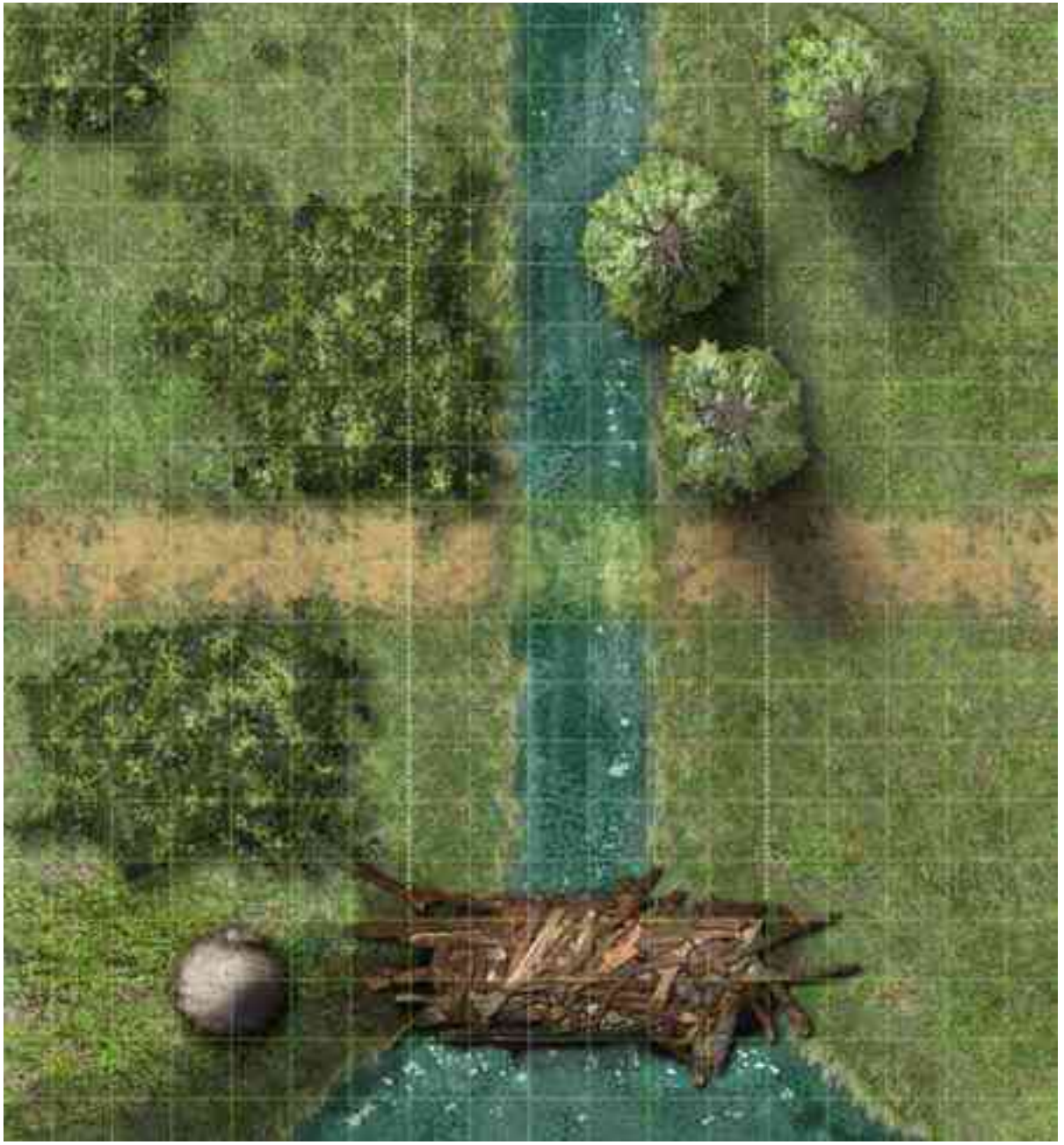
When the adventurers arrive at the stream, read:

A fast-running stream rushes from a nearby beaver dam. The trail leads to a shallow crossing before resuming on the other side.

Gnolls in service to the trapped beholder patrol this crossing with several trained owlbears. They have slain the beavers that built this dam and now ambush any creatures crossing the stream.

If the adventurers are pursuing Keljack, the outlaws were ambushed by the gnolls as they crossed the stream. Fool escaped, but Keljack was captured and is being taken to the beholder by the gnoll pack lord and one of the trained owlbears. The rest of the gnolls and the owlbears are lounging in the open, not expecting another group of trespassers so soon.

If the adventurers and Keljack are traveling together, then the gnolls and the owlbears are hiding



in the bushes across the stream, and the adventurers can spot them with a DC 22 Perception check. With a DC 16 Perception check, an adventurer notices numerous tracks, large and small, crisscrossing the trail on the other side of the stream.

Tactics

If the monsters are encountered in the open, they take cover in the bushes and try to draw the adventurers across the stream before destroying the dam.

If the monsters are in hiding, they try to ambush the first adventurer who steps past the flood line on their side of the stream. The pack lord then attempts to push the boulder into the dam, destroying it in hopes of separating the party.

The gnolls have been instructed to kill any creature except Keljack that tries to enter the area. The gnolls fight to the death. If no gnolls are alive to direct them, the owlbears flee when bloodied.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Bright light during the day or dim light at night.

Beaver Dam: The gnolls have removed key pieces of the dam so that it will fall apart when hit by the boulder. An adventurer can balance on the dam with a DC 16 Acrobatics check.

Boulder: The boulder is perched on a steep rise over the dam and can be pushed into the dam with a DC 16 Strength check as a standard action.

Bushes: The thick bushes on the other side of the trail are difficult terrain and provide partial concealment.

Crossing: The crossing is difficult terrain.

Flood: If the dam breaks, creatures between the flood lines must make a DC 16 Strength check or be pushed 2d4 squares downstream.

Flood Line: The white dotted lines on the map indicate the level to which the water rises if the dam breaks.

Pond: The pond is deep but placid (DC 10 Athletics check to swim).

Stream: A character must make a DC 15 Athletics check to swim in the stream. If it is in flood, swimming the stream becomes a DC 20 Athletics check.

Trees: The trees are 20 feet tall and provide partial concealment to any creature beneath their branches. The trunks can be climbed with a DC 15 Athletics check. A creature pushed downstream can make a saving throw to catch the adjacent trunk or the branches of any tree it passes. If the saving throw succeeds, the forced movement ends.

Treasure: None.

Development

Proceed to **Encounter 4: An End to Madness**.

3 Gnoll Far Fangs — **Level 8 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid — XP 350

HP 68; **Bloodied** 34 — **Initiative** +9
AC 22, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 19 — **Perception** +11
Speed 8 — Low-light vision

Traits

Pack Attack
The gnoll's attacks deal 5 extra damage to any enemy that has two or more of the gnoll's allies adjacent to it.

Standard Actions

Handaxe (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 7 damage, or 2d6 + 9 while the gnoll is bloodied.

Fang Bow (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 30 (one or two creatures); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 5 damage, or 2d10 + 7 while the gnoll is bloodied.

Hungry Arrows (weapon) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 5 damage, or 2d10 + 7 while the gnoll is bloodied. The target takes ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Skills Stealth +14

Str 17 (+7)	**Dex** 21 (+9)	**Wis** 15 (+6)
Con 14 (+6)	**Int** 9 (+3)	**Cha** 7 (+2)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common
Equipment leather armor, handaxe, fang bow (longbow)

Gnoll Pack Lord **Level 8 Controller (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid XP 350

HP 90; **Bloodied** 45 **Initiative** +6
AC 22, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 19, **Will** 22 **Perception** +6
Speed 8 Low-light vision

Traits

Pack Attack
The gnoll's attacks deal 5 extra damage to any enemy that has two or more of the gnoll's allies adjacent to it.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Flail** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 11 damage.

Demonic Frenzy (charm) ✦ **Recharge** when an ally drops to 0 hit points
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +11 vs. Will
Hit: The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls until the end of its next turn. In addition, the target uses a free action to make two basic attacks against a target or targets of the gnoll's choice.
Effect: The target is dazed until the end of its next turn.

Feed on the Weak ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Area burst 1 within 5 (enemies in the burst); +11 vs. Will
Hit: The target grants combat advantage until the start of its next turn.
Effect: One ally in the burst can make a basic attack as a free action.

Minor Actions

Pack Cackle ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Effect: Close burst 5 (allies in the burst). Each target can shift up to 2 squares as a free action.

Str 17 (+7)	**Dex** 15 (+6)	**Wis** 15 (+6)
Con 18 (+8)	**Int** 10 (+4)	**Cha** 20 (+9)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Common
Equipment leather armor, flail

2 or 3 Trained Owlbears **Level 9 Soldier**
Large fey beast XP 400

HP 96; **Bloodied** 48 **Initiative** +8
AC 24, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 20 **Perception** +7
Speed 7 Darkvision

Standard Actions

⊕ **Claw** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 8 damage.

Thunderous Shriek (thunder) ✦ **Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Close burst 2 (creatures in the burst); +12 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 4d6 + 5 thunder damage, and the target is knocked prone.

Triggered Actions

Guardian Claw ✦ **At-Will**
Trigger: An enemy adjacent to the trained owlbear makes an attack that does not include it.
Attack (Opportunity Action): Melee 1 (triggering enemy); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 8 damage.
Miss: 5 damage.

Str 19 (+8)	**Dex** 14 (+6)	**Wis** 16 (+7)
Con 16 (+7)	**Int** 2 (+0)	**Cha** 10 (+4)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** -

Encounter 4: An End to Madness

Encounter Level 9+ (2,000+ XP)

Setup

1 beholder

The source of Keljack's woes is the beholder's stasis crystal. The presence of the missing bit of magic in Keljack's body allows the beholder to finally emerge.

If the adventurers are pursuing Keljack, then the gnoll pack lord and one trained owlbear from **Encounter 3: The Stream** are present, and they start adjacent to the crystal.

As the adventurers arrive, read the following:
A large, red crystal obelisk is embedded in a hillock amid this shallow swamp. Enormous trees rise from the waters, their branches weaving a dense canopy overhead.

If the adventurers arrive in Keljack's company, they have the opportunity to prepare themselves for whatever happens when Keljack touches the crystal.

Keljack hasn't come this far to turn around now. He can feel the magic singing in his body; he knows he needs to touch the crystal. Keljack starts the encounter adjacent to the crystal. Allow the players to place their characters and Fool around the map as they see fit. With time on their side, they can easily identify and avoid the squares of grasping bog.

If the adventurers are pursuing Keljack and succeeded in **Encounter 2: Into the Scar**, then they arrive as the gnoll pack lord is dragging Keljack to the crystal and the beholder is being released. Fool enters the combat in the second round in an attempt to rescue Keljack.

If the adventurers failed **Encounter 2: Into the Scar** and Keljack got ahead of them or was

captured, the party arrives as Keljack dies beneath the beholder's deadly gaze. Fool witnesses Keljack's death from the trees, panics, and flees into the depths of the Scar.

When Keljack is adjacent to the beholder or when he is killed, read:

Suddenly, in a flash of light, the shard flies from within Keljack's body and reintegrates with the rest of the crystal. The stasis shell falls away in a shower of fragments, leaving a beholder hovering above the swamp and casting its gaze toward the nearest enemy.

Tactics

With typical arrogance, the beholder considers itself invincible against this party of adventurers. Defeat is inconceivable, and it does not retreat.

If the adventurers accompanied Keljack here, then he and Fool fight the beholder alongside the heroes. If the characters pursued Keljack to this site, then he and Fool flee for their lives, leaving the adventurers and the beholder to work out their differences.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Dim light during the day, darkness at night.

Dry Land: Small hillocks of land emerge from the water and are normal terrain.

Grasping Bog: The white dotted lines on the map enclose squares of grasping bog. A grasping bog is difficult terrain. In addition, a creature that falls prone in a square of grasping bog is restrained and cannot stand up (save ends both).

Stasis Crystal: The beholder's translucent stasis crystal is 10 feet in diameter and 10 feet tall (another 5 feet of its height is buried in the bog). The crystal is slippery (DC 20 Athletics check to climb). It is immune to damage, and it provides cover.

Beholder **Level 9 Solo Artillery**
Large aberrant magical beast XP 2,000

HP 392; **Bloodied** 196 **Initiative** +9
AC 23, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 22 **Perception** +11
Speed 0, fly 4 (hover) All-around vision, darkvision
Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2

Traits

All-Around Vision
Enemies can't gain combat advantage by flanking the beholder.

Standard Actions

Bite ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); 14 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 8 damage.

Eye Rays ✦ At-Will
Effect: The beholder uses two of the following eye rays, using each against a different target. This attack does not provoke opportunity attacks.
1. *Charm Ray* (charm): Ranged 10; +14 vs. Will; the target is dominated until the end of its next turn.
2. *Wounding Ray* (necrotic): Ranged 10; +14 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 6 necrotic damage.
3. *Sleep Ray* (charm): Ranged 10; +14 vs. Will; the target is immobilized (save ends).
   First Failed Saving Throw: The target is knocked unconscious instead of immobilized (save ends).
4. *Telekinesis Ray*: Ranged 10; +14 vs. Fortitude; the beholder slides the target up to 4 squares.
5. *Slowing Ray* (necrotic): Ranged 10; +14 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 5 necrotic damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).
6. *Brilliant Ray* (radiant): Ranged 10; +14 vs. Will; 1d6 + 5 radiant damage, and the target is blinded (save ends).
7. *Terror Ray* (fear, psychic): Ranged 10; +14 vs. Will; 2d8 + 5 psychic damage, and the beholder pushes the target its speed.
8. *Petrifying Ray*: Ranged 10; +14 vs. Fortitude; the target is petrified (save ends).
   Aftereffect: The target is immobilized (save ends).
9. *Death Ray* (necrotic): Ranged 10; +14 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 10 necrotic damage. If the target is bloodied before or after the attack, it is also dazed (save ends).
   First Failed Saving Throw: The target is dazed and weakened (save ends both).
   Second Failed Saving Throw: The target dies.
10. *Disintegrate Ray*: Ranged 10; +14 vs. Fortitude; 1d8 + 5 damage, and ongoing 10 damage (save ends).

Eye Ray Frenzy ✦ Recharge ⁞⁞
Requirement: The beholder must be bloodied.
Effect: As *eye rays* above, except the beholder makes three eye ray attacks.

Minor Actions

Central Eye ✦ At-Will (1/round)
Attack: Close blast 5 (enemies in the blast); +12 vs. Will
Hit: The target cannot use encounter or daily attack powers until the end of its next turn.

Triggered Actions

Random Eye Ray ✦ At-Will
Trigger: The beholder is conscious and an enemy starts its turn within 5 squares of it.
Effect (No Action): The beholder uses one random eye ray against the triggering enemy.

Str 18 (+8)	**Dex** 20 (+9)	**Wis** 15 (+6)
Con 18 (+8)	**Int** 19 (+8)	**Cha** 20 (+9)

Alignment evil **Languages** Deep Speech

Swamp: The ground beneath the shallow water is difficult terrain. An adventurer can drop prone in the water to gain partial cover against ranged attacks.

Trees: The trees in this area (represented on the map by their trunks) spread their branches into a thick, interwoven canopy 20 feet above the swamp. The trees can be climbed vertically, and the canopy can be traversed horizontally, each with a DC 15 Athletics check.

Treasure: If the characters search the area where the crystal shattered, they find five large pieces that can be carried away. Each of these fragments is worth 1,000 gp to the right buyer. The wizards Nimozaran the Green in Fallcrest and Citirian in Restwell Keep would be especially interested.

GET THEM!

The adventurers might ignore the beholder in favor of pursuing Keljack and Fool. They can corner the outlaws while leaving the much slower beholder behind them.

In the beholder's mind, running away is the proper response to its presence. It has nothing against the adventurers personally, and if left alone it floats off into the Scar to pursue its long-delayed plans for world domination.

The beholder has an in-depth understanding of the meteor's powers, and it can be a great asset to the evil powers gathered around the meteor. If the adventurers continue to adventure in the Chaos Scar, they are likely to encounter the beholder again, possibly in connection with the Brotherhood of the Scar.

Concluding the Adventure

If Keljack and Fool survive at the party's side, their fate is up to the adventurers. Keljack asks the adventurers if they would be willing to help free Fool's tribe from the dragon Maluriath. The red dragon and the rest of Fool's tribe appear in the next Chaos Scar adventure, "Reflections of Ruin" (*Dungeon* 194).

If Keljack and Fool flee the final encounter, the adventurers can attempt to hunt them down. If the outlaws are cornered, they fight until dead or unconscious (see the "Dead or Alive?" sidebar in Encounter 1 for more information).

If Keljack dies, Fool might attempt to enlist the adventurers' aid to free his tribe from the dragon, depending on his relationship with the party.

In all cases, the death of the beholder lifts the madness from Keljack's mind. He is free as never before to choose his own path in life, though he now ages at a normal rate. Perhaps, with the adventurers' help, he can rise above the villainous identity he has forged for himself.

Treasure: If Keljack survives the fight with the beholder at the party's side, he promises them 3,000 gp and a level 9 magic item from his personal stash once they leave the Scar.

If the adventurers take Keljack and Fool to Fallcrest, the Lord Warden rewards them with 3,600 gp.

About the Author

Andrew Scheider is an author and freelance game designer in the Washington, DC, area. His recent credits include "Reign of Despair" (*Dungeon* 191), "Creature Incarnations: Fomorians" (*Dungeon* 176), and "Channel Divinity: Ioun" (*Dragon* 385).

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Creature Incarnations: Abyssal Plague Demons

By Michael E. Shea

Illustrations by Kieran Yanner

Deep in the bowels of the Abyss lies the prison of the evil god Tharizdun. Also called the Chained God and the Elder Elemental Eye, Tharizdun created the Abyss by piercing the deepest layers of the Elemental Chaos with a crystal of pure evil, the Heart of the Abyss. For eons Tharizdun has been imprisoned by the other gods, and he has waited and watched for opportunities to spread his malevolence throughout the multiverse.

That time has now come.

A cult loyal to Tharizdun performed a dark ritual to penetrate his prison, and though the Chained God could not escape, the essence of his will did, in the form of a sentient red liquid laced with silver and flecked with gold, known as the Voidharrow. This essence infects all creatures it touches, filling them with great strength and Tharizdun's desire to destroy all of creation. The opening into Tharizdun's prison tore through the fabric of space and time, allowing the Voidharrow to seep into many worlds simultaneously. Athas, Faerûn, Eberron, and the world of the Nentir Vale are not safe from its evil touch.

Abyssal plague demons were introduced in *Monster Vault*™*: Threats to the Nentir Vale*. This article presents more powerful Abyssal plague demons, the carriers of the dark will of the Chained God.

General Abyssal Plague Knowledge

The following general knowledge of the Abyssal plague might become available to adventurers as they investigate the Voidharrow's infiltration of the multiverse.

DC 14 Heal: Each outbreak of the Abyssal plague is marked by the appearance of a strange dark red crystalline growth on the victims, in either solid or liquid form. The crystals appear to be laced with silver and flecked with gold. Infected creatures gain both unnatural strength and a desire to destroy all living creatures.

DC 20 History: Although the Abyssal plague has appeared only recently, the phrases invoked by those infected come from a foul, ancient language. No direct translations can be made of the more complicated phrases, but the simpler phrases speak of a world of complete darkness, devoid of life, and an insatiable hunger for destruction that has existed since the beginning of creation.

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DC 28 Religion: The plague appears to be transmitted to its victims by their consuming the Voidharrow, or by coming into contact with it or the blood of a carrier. The malevolence of the plague and its victims is divine in nature. Victims of the plague use symbols and scripts associated with worship of the Chained God, an imprisoned deity feared by all other gods. Although the physical manifestation of the disease gives its victims great strength and a burning desire for destruction, the will of its victims appears enslaved to that of this dark god.

LEVELING CREATURES THE CHRIS PERKINS WAY

This article outlines a series of monsters at the paragon tier, but these creatures might not be of an ideal level for your own adventure. Luckily, Chris Perkins gave us valuable tips for leveling or de-leveling creatures in his article "Instant Monster." To increase the level of a creature, add 1 to all defenses, attacks, damage, and 10 hit points per level. Subtract 1 from defenses, attacks, damage, and 10 hit points per level to lower the level of a creature. For a minion, replace its damage with 4 plus one-half the minion's level. Don't worry too much about the other stats; the players tend not to notice them at the gaming table. You can apply these tools to bring these Abyssal plague demons into your campaign regardless of the level.

Abyssal Plague Animated Corpse

The lowest form of the Abyssal plague can infect fresh humanoid corpses, resulting in ferocious hordes of reanimated dead bent on slaying every living creature in their path. An Abyssal plague animated corpse is a decaying humanoid body with red crystals protruding from its skin and a dark red liquid oozing from its eyes, mouth, or any open wounds.

Lore

DC 19 Arcana: Exposed to the strange transformative powers of the Abyssal plague, a reanimated corpse attacks with a mindless ferocity, attempting to destroy any living creature in its path.

DC 27 Religion: The animated corpse is driven by the malevolent will of the Chained God. Though the plague-infected creature has poor control over its body, the crystalline infection gives it greater physical resilience, and the will of the Voidharrow imbues it with a strong mental resolve.

Abyssal Plague Animated Corpse **Level 11 Minion Skirmisher**
Medium elemental humanoid (demon, undead) XP 150

HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion. **Initiative** +8
AC 25, **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 21 **Perception** +7
Speed 5 Darkvision
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 10 necrotic, 10 psychic

Traits
☼ **Telepathic Scream** ✦ **Aura** 1
Enemies grant combat advantage while in the aura.

Standard Actions
⊕ **Slam** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +16 vs. AC
Hit: 9 damage.

Triggered Actions
✧ **Plague Spread** (necrotic, psychic) ✦ **Encounter**
Trigger: The animated corpse drops to 0 hit points.
Effect: Close burst 1 (creatures in the burst). Each target takes ongoing 10 necrotic and psychic damage (save ends).

Str 20 (+10)	**Dex** 13 (+6)	**Wis** 14 (+7)
Con 21 (+10)	**Int** 1 (0)	**Cha** 1 (0)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** –

Tactics

Though the evil force infecting an animated corpse gives it a strong will, this malevolence cares little for the survival of the corpse it animates. An Abyssal plague animated corpse does little to avoid opportunity attacks. Though it might initially attack defenders who draw its attention, it might turn against a weaker foe if it sees the exposed flesh of an unarmored enemy. Abyssal plague animated corpses attack in packs of six or more, but might appear in greater numbers if they spawned at a location where a large number of humanoid corpses are found.

Abyssal Plague Swarm

An Abyssal plague swarm is composed of tiny red beetles with barbed pincers that drip with the same red liquid that forms their crystalline bodies. They spawn in large, bloated orbs found near an infestation of the Abyssal plague.

Lore

DC 20 Heal: The large pincers on each of the demonic insects in an Abyssal plague swarm can pierce through cloth, leather, or skin. The beetles latch onto a victim and then burrow under the skin, causing grievous wounds and taking over the victim's mind.

DC 28 Arcana: Abyssal plague swarms are the original carriers of the disease into the mortal realm. In severe outbreaks, crystalline orbs grow bloated with tiny red crystal beetlelike demons that have silvery traces and gold flecks.

THE VOIDHARROW

The relationship between the Voidharrow and Tharizdun is more complicated than mortals can understand. Though the two conscious entities had been entombed together since creation, their minds were not fully entwined. While Tharizdun commanded his cultists to set him free, it was the Voidharrow that escaped. Tharizdun still seeks freedom, but the Voidharrow's primary goal now is to spread its disease as far as possible.

Tactics

Abyssal plague swarms attack with a single consciousness. Unlike other swarms, the intelligence of a plague swarm helps it avoid damage and seek an advantageous position. It tries to avoid taking unnecessary opportunity attacks and being the target of area attacks. It seeks a useful host for its *infestation*, preferring a ranged striker or a melee striker with nearby allies. An Abyssal plague swarm seeks to draw as many enemies into its aura as it can.

Abyssal Plague Swarm	**Level 12 Skirmisher**
Medium elemental beast (demon, swarm)	XP 700
HP 121; **Bloodied** 60	**Initiative** +14
AC 26, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 24	**Perception** +11
Speed 5	Darkvision
Resist 10 necrotic, 10 psychic, half damage from melee and ranged attacks; **Vulnerable** 10 to close and area attacks	

Traits

☼ **Frenzied Swarm** (necrotic, psychic) ✦ **Aura** 1
Any enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 10 necrotic and psychic damage.

Swarm
The swarm can occupy the same space as another creature, and an enemy can enter its space, which is difficult terrain. The swarm cannot be pulled, pushed, or slid by melee or ranged attacks. It can squeeze through any opening that is large enough for a Tiny creature.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Crushing Will** (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one target); +15 vs. Will
Hit: 3d6 + 10 psychic damage.
Effect: Before or after the attack, the swarm shifts up to 2 squares.

⸸ **Infestation** (disease, psychic) ✦ **Recharge** when the attack misses
Attack: Melee 1 (one target); +15 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 4d8 + 7 psychic damage, and the target is dominated (save ends). The swarm is then removed from play. When the domination ends, the swarm reappears in an unoccupied square adjacent to the target, or in the nearest unoccupied square if that one is occupied.
Aftereffect: The target takes ongoing 5 psychic damage and is dazed (save ends both). At the end of the encounter, the target makes a saving throw. On a failure, the target contracts greater Abyssal plague (stage 1).

Str 16 (+9)	**Dex** 22 (+12)	**Wis** 20 (+11)
Con 17 (+9)	**Int** 14 (+8)	**Cha** 13 (+7)

Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** –

Abyssal Plague Swarmbringer

Built to spread the Abyssal plague among all known worlds, the swarmbringer is a vessel of destruction and pestilence. A swarmbringer is 10 feet tall and resembles a crystalline spider, with a swarm-filled crystal vessel on its back. It stands on eight legs that are strong and sharp enough to tear into steel.

Abyssal Plague Swarmbringer **Level 14 Elite Brute**
Large elemental beast (demon) XP 2,000

HP 340; **Bloodied** 170 **Initiative** +8
AC 26, **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 26 **Perception** +11
Speed 6 Darkvision
Resist 10 necrotic, 10 psychic
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Standard Actions

Crystalline Pincers ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +19 vs. AC
Hit: 3d10 + 11 damage.

Double Attack ✦ At-Will
Attack: The swarmbringer uses *crystalline pincers* twice.

Plague Infestation (disease, necrotic, psychic) **✦ Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Melee 1 (one or two creatures); +17 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 3d10 + 15 damage, and ongoing 10 necrotic and psychic damage (save ends). At the end of the encounter, the target makes a saving throw. On a failure, the target contracts greater Abyssal plague (stage 1).

Triggered Actions

Plague Release (necrotic, psychic, zone) **✦ Encounter**
Trigger: The swarmbringer drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (No Action): A zone appears in a burst 1 centered on the swarmbringer. The zone lasts until the end of the encounter. Any creature that ends its turn in the zone takes 10 necrotic and psychic damage.

Skills Endurance +17
Str 23 (+13) **Dex** 13 (+8) **Wis** 18 (+11)
Con 20 (+12) **Int** 16 (+10) **Cha** 14 (+9)
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Primordial

Lore

Arcana DC 21: Fueled by a desire to spread the Abyssal plague and designed to slay any living creature in its path, the swarmbringer is a terror to behold. Its razor-sharp pincers pose a threat to any hero, but the true horror is the plague it carries in the vessel on its back.

Religion DC 28: Although its pure hatred for the living would indicate a beast with a single purpose, the swarmbringer possesses great intelligence. It is said that if you listen closely, you can hear the whisper of the Chained God in the chittering of the beast.

Nature DC 28: The death of a swarmbringer releases the plague it carries. The ground upon which it dies remains infected with the creature's malevolence even after the monster is destroyed.

Tactics

Though it appears brutal and chaotic and it attacks ferociously, the swarmbringer applies tactics to combat. When it has the opportunity to break away from a heavily armored defender, it does so to attack weaker opponents.

The Abyssal plague pool released from a slain swarmbringer has a lasting effect on terrain. A battleground might already contain pools from previously slain Abyssal plague swarmbringers.

Voidharrow Doomcaller

A devastating manifestation of the Voidharrow, a doomcaller is capable of infecting an entire kingdom. It is a 15-foot-tall incubator for the plague, continually generating the secretions and carriers of the disease.

Lore

Religion DC 22: The Voidharrow doomcaller is a dangerous construct that uses a direct connection to the will of the Voidharrow to spread both the physical plague and the malevolence of its creator.

Voidharrow Doomcaller **Level 15 Elite Controller**
Huge elemental beast (demon) XP 2,400

HP 282; **Bloodied** 141 **Initiative** +10
AC 29, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 27 **Perception** +17
Speed 5 Darkvision
Resist 10 necrotic, 10 psychic
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

Plague Aura (necrotic, psychic) **✦ Aura** 3
While the doomcaller is bloodied, any enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 10 necrotic and psychic damage.

Standard Actions

Shredding Claw ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); +20 vs. AC
Hit: 3d10 + 7 damage.

Plague Spike (disease, necrotic, psychic) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 5 (one creature); +18 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d8 + 9 necrotic and psychic damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends). At the end of the encounter, the target makes a saving throw. On a failure, the target contracts greater Abyssal plague (stage 1).

Spore Burst (charm, disease, necrotic, psychic) **✦ Recharge** ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (enemies in the burst); +18 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + 8 necrotic and psychic damage, and the target takes a free action to make a basic attack against its nearest ally. At the end of the encounter, the target makes a saving throw. On a failure, the target contracts greater Abyssal plague (stage 1).

Minor Actions

Abyssal Roar (fear, psychic) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Close blast 3 (creatures in the blast); +18 vs. Will
Hit: 2d8 + 8 psychic damage, and the doomcaller pushes the target up to 3 squares.

Triggered Actions

Plague Release (necrotic, psychic, zone) **✦ Encounter**
Trigger: The doomcaller drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (No Action): A zone appears in a burst 1 centered on the doomcaller. The zone lasts until the end of the encounter. Any creature that ends its turn in the zone takes 10 necrotic and psychic damage.

Skills Arcana +18
Str 17 (+10) **Dex** 16 (+10) **Wis** 21 (+12)
Con 13 (+8) **Int** 23 (+13) **Cha** 14 (+9)
Alignment chaotic evil **Languages** Abyssal, Primordial

Arcana DC 30: Though its intelligence is beyond mortal understanding, the Voidharrow doomcaller follows the agenda of the Voidharrow. It sows the seeds of destruction everywhere it walks.

Tactics

Possessing great intelligence, the doomcaller relies on lesser plague demons to protect it while it attacks with plague spikes and spore bursts from afar. When in melee with a single enemy, it uses *shredding claw* to tear its foe down. If it is engaged in melee combat with more than one enemy, it uses *abyssal roar* to push them back and then moves into a more advantageous position. When it is bloodied, it moves to a location where its *plague aura* can affect the greatest number of targets.

Greater Abyssal Plague

Abyssal plague demons have the ability to spread the Abyssal plague disease. Those who battle against these creatures might become infected with the same disease that transformed their opponents into plague demons.

Lore

History DC 20: Outbreaks of the Abyssal plague, though rare, have had devastating consequences. Entire villages have been put to the torch to prevent its spread.

Heal or Nature DC 20: The Abyssal plague is highly contagious. Even if only one creature catches it from a plague demon, the plague can infect those who travel with the afflicted companion, eventually spreading the disease throughout the world.

Arcana or Religion DC 20: Those who have survived the plague have said they experienced a vision of an enormously powerful entity trapped in a void of darkness and desolation. While the plague grew stronger, the victims heard the whisper of this entity and became filled with a desire to destroy every living creature.

Greater Abyssal Plague Level 13 Disease

Those infected by this disease slowly develop oozing sores, blisters, and growths that appear to be made of dark red crystal with silver veins and gold flecks. The crystal can be in either liquid or solid form.

Stage 0: The target recovers from the disease.

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target exhibits sores and growths across 10 percent of the body and loses a healing surge. While the target is in this stage, any uninfected creature that spends at least 8 hours with the target must succeed on a DC 14 Endurance check at the end of that creature's next extended rest or also become infected (stage 1).

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the target has sores and growths over 50 percent of the body and loses a healing surge. The target also takes a -2 penalty to AC, Fortitude, and Reflex, and it gains vulnerable 5 to all damage. While the target is in this stage, any uninfected creature that spends at least 8 hours with the target must succeed on a DC 14 Endurance check at the end of that creature's next extended rest or also become infected (stage 1).

Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, the target has sores and growths over 90 percent of the body and loses two healing surges. The target also takes a -2 penalty to AC, Fortitude, and Reflex, and it gains vulnerable 10 to all damage. In addition, the target becomes increasingly disoriented and chaotic as the demonic nature of the disease takes hold. While the target is in this stage, any uninfected creature that spends at least 8 hours with the target must succeed on a DC 20 Endurance check at the end of that creature's next extended rest or also become infected (stage 1).

Stage 4: The target dies, exploding into three Abyssal plague swarms.

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes an Endurance check if it is at stage 1, 2, or 3.
13 or Lower: The stage of the disease increases by 1.
14–19: No change.
20 or Higher: The stage of the disease decreases by 1.

About the Author

Mike Shea is the webmaster of SlyFlourish.com, a site focused on helping the 4th Edition Dungeon Master. He is the author of Sly Flourish's Dungeon Master Tips and Sly Flourish's Running Epic Tier D&D Games. Mike lives with his wife, Michelle, and his dire worg, Jebu.

Murdering Writer's Block

By Stephen Radney-MacFarland

Illustration by Alexander Nanitchkov

It's the night before the game. You have your maps and books scattered around you, and the glow of the computer monitor is the only thing lighting the room. Tomorrow the heroes of your campaign, after many hard skirmishes, will find the linchpin clue that allows them to locate the dread Guild of Shadow Assassins. There's a problem; your grand and glorious plan has just come up against writer's block, and in your hour of need, all that stares back at you is a blank page and a blinking cursor.

Sure, DMs are not novelists or poets, but being a DM draws on the same creative tendencies that those artists use, and like a novelist or a poet, a DM can sometimes find creativity to be elusive, not out of lack of skill or ambition, but because our brains are strangely stubborn at times and can refuse to cooperate.

There are a number of legitimate reasons for writers block. Work stress, a pile of bills, finals with a stack of books you haven't cracked, unrequited love, over-requited love, low iron levels, you live in the Northwest and haven't seen the sun for months. All of these things may seem like excuses, and to an extent they are, but figuring out what's muddling your mind can be the first step in getting those words and stats flowing again. That's all writer's block really is: a mind so fixated or debilitated by something else that it can't concentrate on the task at hand, and it lacks outside stimulus to knock it out of this rut. Remember, like novelists and poets, we tend to work by ourselves. Realizing exactly what is bothering you and being honest about it is the first step toward the eventual murder of writer's block. This is not as easy as it sounds. The things that bother us the most are things we tend to want to avoid with proportionate strength, and their resolution may seem much more difficult than getting your creative act together, but don't fool yourself. Both will give you problems until you recognize and find a way to deal with the main issue.

Okay, self-reflection and personal problem-solving is a weighty topic for most, and I like to write a helpful and entertaining column, so what about simple tricks to shrug off the dreaded block? Tips that might not solve the main problem, but can get you through the proverbial night. I've got you covered.

Change the Setting

Writer's block is a problem that dwells firmly in our mind, but our mind is constantly taking stimulus from outside and processing it. When greeted with the familiar, synapses respond in predictable patterns. For instance, I always love the smell of old pulp Ace Fantasy paperbacks. My first game store in Staten

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Island was full of them, and their odor hung in the air like musk. That store was so filled with some of my greatest geek memories—I bought *Unearthed Arcana*, *T1-4 The Temple of Elemental Evil*, my Fafhrd and the Grey Mouser Ace Fantasy paperbacks, and *Watchmen* #1 there—that every time I smell that pulp, my mind goes back to a mental and emotional snapshot of that wondrous place.

Unfortunately, this little trick of our memory and experience has short-term and undesirable phenomena. Like a strange and subtle dog on automatic, our brain is trained by outside stimuli, and the longer you have trouble getting the creative juices flowing, the more likely your normal work area will become a creative oubliette, as your mind starts up familiar sensations, including writer's block, as soon as your butt hits the office chair. Don't get me wrong, a wonderful workspace is to be treasured, and there is no need to abandon a tainted workspace once block descends, but sometimes it's best to retire to another space to work. Work requires rigor, while creativity craves new experiences to draw from and to be influenced by.

Get the hell up. Find the local library, park, coffee shop, or (if you're old enough) friendly tavern. Work there for a while. Talk to new people. Let new sights, sounds, and scents influence your senses. You don't even have to work at it—the act of being somewhere new will change the tenor of your mental state. I think you'll find, after the initial awkwardness of being in a new location wears off, that your creativity will take on a life of its own. Of all of the places I outlined, I find that a library or a coffee shop at a bookstore tends to work best. With shelves of reference and inspiration, there's just more intellectual stimulus to be had in these places.

Maybe you can't just pack up and find a new writing area. Maybe you have kids to watch, or maybe you live in the middle of nowhere. Whatever the reason you can't get the hell up and out, you can try the same trick within your own house and by changing up your daily habits.

Work in the living room for a bit. Change up the music you listen to, the books you read, the TV shows you watch, branch out when it comes to movie genres. I know, I know. We are geeks. We love what we love patiently and with such an attention to detail that we scare the hell out of mere mortals, but sometimes you have to unclench for the greater good. Shake it up, get out of your normal headspace, and get some new experiences and new ideas in your head. Dust out the cobwebs. It will do wonders for your creative release.

Limit Distractions

Given our nerdish tendencies, it's easy to expand our horizons and then become so engrossed in a new obsession that we waste too much time to be creative. I know, it seems like I just told you to find new ways to be distracted, and now I'm saying don't get distracted. What I mean is don't get too distracted. Procrastination is the chief ally of writer's block, and having too many distractions at hand will only deepen the problem.

A good way to limit distractions is to unplug your Internet connection from your home computer. I know, it's hard. How will you know what is going on in the outside world? How will the outside world know what's going on with you? Even among the geekiest of the geeky, we humans are social creatures, and it is hard to stifle the urge to reach out and touch someone, as the commercials used to say. But unless you're among a group of likeminded folks with a collective purpose (see below), your fell humans are crap for productivity. Likely, they are procrastinating over something too, and they will just drag you down into cheap pleasantries, small talk, and the little complaints that get us through the day.

Typically when I have to knuckle down and get some work done, I have the minimal tools open on my computer, and I have the music on. While this is not true for everyone, music helps my mind relax and get into a rhythm while typing, drawing maps, or even researching a set of traps and nasties I have in mind for an encounter. Depending on what music you pick, it might also give you inspiration for those set piece battles. I find that Prog, Emo, Metal (especially Metal from the 80s, which is often inspired by fantasy and horror), and Opera are best for those. Your mileage may vary.

Seek Help

I don't necessarily mean seek help for whatever the problems plaguing you that are contributing to the block, but, hey, that doesn't hurt either. What I mean is that while there is a nice myth of the artist as creative genius—the person that toils in silence and solitude to create the work—that myth talks more to the work and dedication it takes to produce art. For you, the Dungeon Master, that means making or gathering stat blocks, crafting a story, creating NPCs, and organizing the play to make it all happen as seamlessly as possible—and doing all that requires concentration, time, and gumption.

The creative process is often the hangup. Any brain is capable of igniting a creative spark, so you don't necessarily have to depend purely on your own cranium. As with most human endeavors, you can achieve incredible success in harmonized groups, typically small, tight-knit ones. Find a fellow DM, or think about putting together a group of local DMs. When you get together, you can exchange notes, tell stories of the fiendish traps you devised the session before, and get input on your stories, NPCs, and dungeon locales. Think of it as a writer's group for DMs. These groups can be informal or formal, a chat over lunch is great in a pinch, and monthly meetings when you exchange notes can be fun. These types of

meetings are often great tools for both established and amateur artists. There is no reason that DMs can't find similar advantage in them.

Another way to seek help is to go out and actually read (not just collect) published adventures. There are plenty of them out there, and each one contains a lot of rules bits and ideas to plunder. Don't worry about the edition or the game system either. I've found a great deal of inspiration for my D&D games in the adventures and supplements of other systems.

Finally, I know I've said it before, but actually going out and playing in a game run by another DM can also be helpful. Not only can you steal . . . I mean, borrow . . . ideas, it gives you a change to change that perspective, and look at the game from another angle, which might just give you the shove that you need to wrangle some inspiration and murder that pesky writer's block.

The next time you look at the screen and wish you could just get the ideas to flow, try some of these suggestions.

Mailbag

It's time to take a look in the mailbag. The following questions come not from the Save My Game group, but from players who track me down at shows, through e-mail and Facebook. If you have a question, you can track me down by hook or by crook, but the best method is the Save My Game group.

That Guy . . .

I play with this guy, and he's a total jerk. He argues with the DM constantly, he tells bad jokes, and makes stupid decisions during actual play, but then goes on and criticizes everyone else's decision. He's just a jerk, and I don't like him, but I don't know what to do.

–Frustrated Frank via e-mail

There is an excellent bit of wisdom that says that you should never play games with people you don't like. Sadly, that isn't always possible. My chief advice in these cases is fix what you can, and endure what you cannot. I would talk to that guy, explain–calmly, nicely, unemotionally–the things he does that slow down the game and make it less fun for you. If you're not the only one in the group who feels this way, make it an intervention of sorts, just softer, maybe with a nice meal involved. Sometimes "that guy" doesn't realize he is being a jerk. He thinks he is being funny or clever. In that way, all of us have been "that guy" once or twice. You may find that when brought out in the open, the problem is easier to solve than you might think.

And other times it's not. I've definitely played with "that guy" who feels like he should be able to act whatever way he wants, say anything that enters his twisted little head, and no one has the right to call him on any of it. In these cases you have to see if the rest of the group feels the same way you do, and if so, ask him to leave the game. If the clash is merely between you and "that guy," then ask yourself which is more important–holding your tongue or playing the game? It's that simple. If you decide to stick it out, my only advice is to have a thick skin. That's gotten me through a lot of similar gaming relationships.

Too Much Stuff

I guess you could say I'm a collector or a completist. When I buy a game, I have to have everything for the game, even if I don't play it that much. The problem is that my house is a mess. I have piles and piles of games, some of which I know I will not play or at least play that often. My girlfriend says that I should just get rid of them, but I can't do that.

Give it to me straight. What should I do with all my stuff?

–Buried Bryce via e-mail

I'm with you, buddy. The hoarding tendency is strong with enthusiasts of all stripes. I have an uncle who is a train nerd (yeah, train nerd) and his house is full of all things railroad, both model and real. Heck, my place is a jumble of games, minis, dice, and game aids. Eventually, though, you (and any significant others) have to be able to walk though your abode. Most of the time, organization is key. Take inventory of your gaming stuff; divide it up into the things you use often and those that can go into deeper storage. Keep the stuff you use more often at hand and easy to get to on bookshelves, but the other stuff, no matter how cool it is or how often you feel like you should be using it, can go into storage. This storage can be as simple as file boxes stored in closets or as expensive and remote as off-site storage that you pay for.

Oh, and one last thing. Your girlfriend is not wrong. As you are going through this stuff, ask yourself what you can get rid of. I don't mean throw it away, but maybe give to a friend who has been coveting some obscure thing in your collection, or sell it on eBay. Give each item an honest assessment of how useful that bit of gaming gold is, and act accordingly.

I know the saying that "He with the most toys wins." But that's not true. All you end up having is more clutter.

About the Author

Stephen Radney-MacFarland is a game designer living large in the Seattle area. He was a developer for 4th Edition Dungeons & Dragons, a content developer for 3rd Edition organized play, and he has taught game design for the past three years. Stephen currently works at Paizo Publishing as a designer for the *Pathfinder* Roleplaying Game, writes "Save My Game," and works on the occasional D&D product. He also runs more games than his wife would prefer.

Backdrop: Daggerdale

By Eric Menge

Illustration by Noah Bradley
Cartography by Jared Blando

"Danger has ever plagued these lands; now, the beasts of the hills stalk the night. When the sun sinks, we huddle behind our walls and pray that we live to see the morn. These wolfmen are accomplishing what the Black Network never could: Making us consider abandoning the dale. Come quickly—or there might not be a dale left to save."

—Kessla, owner of The Red Rock

It is said that people don't live in Daggerdale, they survive it. One historian, describing the dale's uneasy past, said that it was as if its first human settlers left ruined Jhaamdath behind only to bring the empire's troubles with them. Daggerdale and its environs have suffered the depredations of vampires, the power struggles of despotic wizards, and the heavy hand of Zhentish occupiers. Now, lycanthropes ravage the land, instilling dread in Daggerdale's denizens night after night, and they are not the only threat: Humanoid monsters have begun raiding from out of the Desertsmouth Mountains in numbers unseen for centuries.

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The stout hearts and strong backs of these Dalesfolk have withstood horrors that would have destroyed or driven off lesser people, but the scope of the current troubles and of other threats from without and within has driven them to the brink of annihilation. If it is to survive, Daggerdale needs heroes.

Geography

Isolated from the rest of the Dales by the rugged Dagger Hills, Daggerdale is characterized by rolling country, broken by rocky valleys, that provides good grazing and supports small farms.

Border Forest: This rugged forest of taiga, pines, and other conifers marks the northern border of Daggerdale. Patches of oak and other deciduous trees dot its warmer and more fertile lowlands.

Centuries ago, intensive Zhentish logging operations in the Border Forest incensed its fey inhabitants, and their fury lingers to this day. With this consideration in mind, the Dalesfolk collect wood from the forest's edge and avoid traveling into its shadowy depths.

Dagger Falls: The River Tesh spills over three stone steps at Dagger Falls before flowing into a large pool. Its final drop is twenty feet, too steep to be navigable by boats. At its base lies the capital of Daggerdale, which bears the same name.

Dagger Hills: Separating Daggerdale from Shadowdale is the most rugged stretch of country in the Dalelands, a broken landscape of steep hills, thorn-choked ravines, and high, hidden glens. Along the trails that run through its crags and valleys, lycanthropes prey upon scattered shepherds, goatherds, and miners.

Desertsmouth Mountains: These forbidding peaks tower over the hills of Daggerdale. Once home to the great dwarven kingdom of Tethyamar, the Desertsmouths are still haunted by descendants of the monstrous enemies that brought the kingdom

THE CLACK ON DAGGERDALE

A character knows the following information with a successful skill check.

History DC 15: Long free of Zhentish influence, Daggerdale has now become an unwilling buffer against the Empire of Netheril. In recent years, the dale has also been troubled by savage humanoids from the Desertsmouth Mountains and lycanthropes from the Dagger Hills.

Nature DC 15: Daggerdale is a hilly land, interrupted here and there by rocky dells and vales. The dale provides ample fodder for grazing animals and supports small farms. Treacherous mountains and rugged hills separate Daggerdale from the rest of the Dalelands.

Religion DC 15: Most inhabitants of Daggerdale worship Amaunator, but they insist on calling him Lathander, the name their ancestors used. The largest temple in the dale, Lathander's Light, is located in Dagger Falls.

Streetwise DC 15: Daggerdale is ruled by the Lord Morn, Barathal Cormaeril, great-grandnephew of Randal Morn and a member of the Cormyrian nobility. With lycanthropes besieging him in Castle Daggerdale, his control of the dale is slipping away.

low. Together with a handful of local dragons, they continue to pose a dire threat to mountain travelers.

For centuries, the soaring massif shielded the dale from the encroaching desert of Anauroch and the initial incursions of the resurgent Empire of Netheril. As Netheril's strength grows, however, the Dalesfolk find the mountains less effective as a bulwark.

Eagles' Eyrie: This bare, rocky ridge above Dagger Falls has long served as a favorite natural lookout. The Tethyamar dwarves utilized its caverns as observation posts, and Randal Morn's men used its hidden passages during their guerrilla war against the Zhentarim. Today, the caverns are abandoned, and the lookout point atop Eagles' Eyrie is unoccupied.

River Tesh: More than a watercourse, this natural highway is the primary route in and out of Daggerdale. The Tesh Trail follows its northern bank as the river flows eastward, past Teshwave, to where its waters empty into the Moonsea at the ruins of Zhentil Keep.

Society

Unlike other dales, which sprouted up in the shade of Cormanthor, Daggerdale was built in the shadow of the dwarven realm of Tethyamar. Dwarven influence still permeates life throughout the region.

Culture: The residents of Daggerdale are hardy, dour, and pragmatic; they face danger frequently and are accustomed to dealing with threats on their own. Despite their wariness of strangers, they are willing to hire and work with adventurers who earn their trust; the tumultuous history of the dale has taught them to appreciate the practical value of skilled allies.

Government: Barathal Cormaeril, the great-grandnephew of Randal Morn, rules the territory from Castle Daggerdale. Known as the Lord Morn, a title adopted by the Cormaerils to justify their rule to the native Dalesfolk, he governs with a light touch; mayors chosen from the elders of each village handle day-to-day administrative matters. The inhabitants of Daggerdale reluctantly accept him as their ruler but wonder if he is a "true Morn."

Military: Members of the Lord's Retinue, one hundred fifty warriors who form the backbone of Daggerdale's military force, patrol dale roads on horseback (but dismount to fight). Most of the warriors are stationed at Castle Daggerdale; the rest are garrisoned in Dagger Falls. When confronting a threat beyond their capabilities, the captains of the Lord's Retinue call upon village militias for support.

Economy: The dale's economy is based on subsistence crops, livestock (especially sheep), and furs. Beryl deposits deep in the Dagger Hills yield emeralds, but the growing lycanthrope threat has made excursions to the mines too dangerous. Daggerdale imports the bulk of its manufactured items.

Religion: Amaunator is commonly worshiped in Daggerdale as Lathander. The people love the Keeper of the Sun for his tireless protection during the dale's wars, invasions, and occupations. His temple in Dagger Falls far outshines other temples in the dale.

Settlements

Daggerdale has 15,000 residents living mostly in fortified homesteads. Its only large settlement is Dagger Falls. Smaller settlements of interest include Castle Daggerdale, Serpentsbridge, and Anathar's Dell.

Dagger Falls

A bit north of its namesake waterfall, above a ford where the Tethyamar Trail crosses the River Tesh, sits a rough-and-tumble frontier town, home to 2,000 Dalesfolk. The stone-built village is as sturdy as its inhabitants: Its steep roofs are designed to hold up under heavy winter snows, and its stone walls make Dagger Falls one of the few safe refuges in the dale. Villagers openly wear weapons.

Constable's Tower: The Zhentarim built this forbidding stronghold to house their constable; today, it plays host to something far more mysterious. When Randal Morn freed Dagger Falls from the Black Network's tyranny, an unexplained event caused a wild magic backfire in the tower. Ever since, fire, lightning, frost, and other eldritch energies have roiled through the structure. It would have

Dagger Falls
The Spur
100 ft
50 ft
Tesh Trail
River Tesh
Dagger Falls
50 ft
8
150 ft
Teldyamar Trail
100 Yards
Key

flown apart or collapsed into ruin long ago, but not for the equally inexplicable mending magic that repairs the damage.

Fallsview Inn: When the Teshford Arms was torched by goblins ten years ago, the smaller Fallsview became the sole inn in Dagger Falls. This was good news for proprietor Gahreald Wylif, who depends on out-of-town visitors to fill his converted Zhentarim warehouse. The villagers view Wylif, a Cormaeril retainer, as another example of outsiders exploiting the noble family's rule of the dale, and they tend to shun the inn.

The Garrison: Unable to reclaim Constable's Tower, Randal Morn converted the old Zhentarim barracks for use by his retinue and the Daggerdale militia. Today, this stone-walled enclosure houses the portion of the Lord's Retinue that is stationed in town. Barathal Cormaeril maintains a household at the facility for use during his frequent visits.

Market Square: When caravans come to town, they head straight to the beating heart of commerce in Dagger Falls, a large, open square marked by a towering statue of Randal Morn. The town's revenues largely derive from fees paid by peddlers, ranchers, and merchants who set up shop in this area, which bustles with activity after the spring wool shearing.

Old Dulwar's Leatherworks: Dulwar was a friend of Randal Morn and a champion in the fight against the Zhentarim. Today his great-grandson, Mathuc, runs his leatherworking shop. Mathuc is happy to keep his illustrious ancestor's name on the sign: It brings in business and wins him reelections as mayor. Supplied with hides brought in by hunters, trappers, and ranchers, the shop produces a wide assortment of leather items.

The Red Rock: Kessla, a retired half-elf minstrel, has run the most popular tavern in Dagger Falls for more than a century. She's old now, and she relies on a small staff to do what she once could do alone. What Kessla doesn't know about the history of the dale isn't worth knowing, and visitors to Dagger Falls will be hard-pressed to find a more entertaining or informative story-spinner.

Temple of Lathander's Light: The Temple of Lathander's Light is one of the great sources of good in the dale. A dozen priests and more than a score of novices live in this large stone building under the guidance of Her Radiance, Dareen Travaskyr, who uses her influence and the temple's wealth to encourage adventurers to quest throughout the dale.

Other Settlements

Although Dagger Falls is the only large settlement in Daggerdale, it is far from the only center of activity. Here are a few other settlements that adventurers will want to know about.

Castle Daggerdale: This solid keep crowns a steep knoll on the western edge of the Dagger Hills overlooking the Tethyamar Trail. The fortress is under perpetual siege by lycanthropes, which hunt throughout the surrounding hills, making entry or exit impossible except in armed groups. Nevertheless, Barathal refuses to abandon his seat of power.

Anathar's Dell: Anathar's Dell is an island of safety in the southern dale. A collective farm, worked by four human and half-elf families, spreads across the valley. Below the farm are mines worked by dwarves of the Brightblade clan. Over the past few years, a growing number of dwarves have gathered in the valley, preparing to reclaim the Mines of Tethyamar.

Serpentsbridge: This thorp, little more than a roadhouse, a toll house, and a few support buildings, grew up around Serpentsbridge, a rickety structure spanning the Dagger River. It survives because of Castle Daggerdale and would soon be abandoned if the castle fell.

History

The dwarves of Tethyamar built the first settlement at Dagger Falls to support a portage around the whitewater and to provide storage for dwarf-mined metals on their way to the southern lands along the Tethyamar Trail. When humans, fleeing the destruction of Jhaamdath, arrived centuries later and spread throughout the Dales, some settled the lowlands near Tethyamar. The dwarves, who had no interest in these lands, welcomed the newcomers and traded with them for food and livestock.

The humans named their new home Merrydale, but whatever good cheer the land initially inspired was replaced by horror when an infestation of vampires descended upon it. Amid the struggle to rid the territory of this bloodsucking blight, the Morns emerged as rulers of the dale. The new rulers renamed the land Daggerdale.

More than three hundred years later, Tethyamar's ruin at the hands of goblins, ogres, giants, and demons collapsed the dale's economy and left its inhabitants defenseless against the Zhentarim invasion. When the Black Network took Dagger Falls, Randal Morn retreated into the hills, preparing to launch the guerrilla war that, thirty years later, would free the territory from Zhentarim tyranny. In the interim, the dale suffered under puppet governments run by foreign powers.

Randal Morn left no heirs; upon his death, the rule of Daggerdale passed to his sister, who had by then married into the noble Cormaeril family of Cormyr. The Cormaerils are fair rulers, but they have much to prove before the Dalesfolk will judge them fit to occupy the ancestral seat of the Morns. They have thus far failed to suppress the humanoid monsters raiding from the Desertsmouth Mountains or crush the lycanthropes terrorizing the Dagger Hills. In light of these distressing failures, the locals question whether Barathal is a "true Morn."

TIMELINE OF RECENT EVENTS

1353 DR Year of the Arch
Randal Morn kills Malyk, a minor mage installed by the Zhentarim as ruler of Daggerdale. The inhabitants of Daggerdale rise up against the occupation.

1369 DR Year of the Gauntlet
Randal Morn reclaims the throne of Daggerdale. The last vestiges of Black Network influence are driven from the dale.

1385 DR Year of Blue Fire
The Spellplague is unleashed after Mystra, the Mother of All Magic, is murdered. Magic bursts its bonds and runs wild across Faerûn, but Daggerdale's isolation protects it from the worst of the resulting destruction.

1391 DR Year of the Wrathful Eye
Randal Morn dies after catching pneumonia on one of his celebrated hunting trips. Randal Morn's nephew, Sathrin Cormaeril, arrives in Daggerdale with his son, Domavos, and claims the throne.

1407 DR Year of the Halls Unhaunted
The Cormaerils rebuild Castle Daggerdale to cement their control of the dale.

1425 DR Year of Seven Sisters
The Dalelands reaffirm the Dales Compact with Myth Drannor and restore the Standing Stone. Domavos Cormaeril, having assumed his father's throne, represents Daggerdale at the event, using the title "the Lord Morn" for the first time.

1469 DR Year of Thundering Hosts
Domavos Cormaeril dies. His son, Barathal, becomes the Lord Morn of Daggerdale.

1475 DR Year of the Final Stand
Barathal's sister, Neranya Cormaeril, is attacked by werewolves near Castle Daggerdale. Her entire escort is slain, but Neranya's body is not among the dead.

1480 DR Year of Deep Water Drifting
Present day.

Ruins

Ruins dot the Daggerdale countryside, from the lowland remnants of abandoned farmsteads to the despoiled halls and mines of the kingdom of Tethyamar in the Desertsmouth Mountains. Throughout the dale, breached and vacated fortifications stand as mute reminders of Zhentarim occupation.

Mines of Tethyamar: The legendary mineral wealth of these mines filled Tethyamar's coffers and supported its vast trading empire for more than a millennium. Several hundred years ago, they fell to a horde of orcs and ogres led by evil wizards and servitor demons. Today, monstrous humanoids still haunt their halls, adventurers still seek their hidden wealth, and the Brightblade clan still dreams of reclaiming the heart of its once-great kingdom (the Mines of Tethyamar feature in the video game *Dungeons & Dragons®: Daggerdale™*, released in May 2011. Find out more at http://www.wizards.com/dnd/daggerdale.aspx

Flaming Tower: On the southern edge of the Border Forest stands the Flaming Tower, built by fire giants as a base from which to terrorize the land. After a group of adventurers slew the giants, the tower stood vacant until the arrival of the Zhentarim, who used it as an anchor for the Temple in the Sky—a shrine, located on a floating rock, that was central to the Black Network's rise to power. Following the ouster of the Zhentarim, the tower fell to ruin. Today, its tumbledown remains are home to a variety of monsters. With his troops spread thin confronting the recent threats facing the dale, the Lord Morn lacks the resources needed to rid the ruins of their dangerous denizens.

The White Crag: Fifteen miles northeast of Castle Daggerdale, the remains of a mysterious structure fill a defile hewn out of the cliff face. The ancient ruin predates the elves' arrival in Cormanthor thousands of years ago, and is rumored to conceal extensive connections to the Underdark.

Adventures in Daggerdale

Daggerdale's rich past and looming dangers make it a land ripe for heroes. Below are a number of possibilities for adventuring in this wild dale.

The Blame Game: The Eldreth Veluuthra, a militant group of human-hating elves, has established a cell in the Flaming Tower in an attempt to broaden its influence beyond the Hullack Forest. The group's leaders believe that Daggerdale teeters on the edge of falling and that a bit more pressure will convince its human occupants to abandon the dale once and for all. To help matters along, these vengeful elves attack isolated farmsteads and kill their inhabitants, but leave clues that implicate humanoid monsters from out of the mountains. Uncovering the truth and rooting out the cell will not be easy: The angry fey of the Border Forest harass any group that tries to follow the elves back to their base.

Too Many Eyes on the Prize: The Brightblade dwarves of Anathar's Dell have a map that shows a

secret way into one of the fallen kingdom's hidden treasuries. Recovering its contents would be an important first step in reclaiming ancient Tethyamar. Little do the dwarves suspect, however, that the Cult of the Dragon knows about the map. Even now, a task force of cultists is keeping the Brightblades under observation, preparing to follow them into the mountains and steal the treasure.

Extending the Olive Branch: Decades have passed since rampant Zhent logging drove the creatures of the Border Forest into their vengeful fury. Perhaps the time has come to make another attempt at peace. Convincing the fey to listen will not be easy; persuading them that the Dalesfolk mean them no harm will require a true diplomat.

Masters of Puppets: Monsters have long plagued the Desertsmouth Mountains, but most of the time they stay among the peaks. Lately, though, raiding parties have been descending upon Daggerdale with unusual frequency and ferocity. In truth, agents from the Empire of Netheril are stirring up the humanoids, using threats and promises to goad them into raiding the dale. Eliminating these Netherese rabble-rousers might return the marauding to normal levels.

Leader of the Pack: Neranya Cormaeril is not dead. After being gravely injured by werewolves five years ago, she was carried off to their lair at White Crag. There, in the moon-drenched ruins, she was turned into a werewolf. Neranya now accompanies the lycanthropes in their savage assaults across the dale, and she has risen in prominence among the shape-shifters because of her ties to her human family. Barathal, who has learned the truth, worries that the Dalesfolk will try to run the Cormaerils out of the area if they discover her involvement. At night, when howls fill the hills surrounding Castle Daggerdale, the Lord Morn wonders which of those voices belongs to the one he used to call sister.

About the Author

Eric Menge is an author, an editor, and an intermittent attorney. He has designed nearly twenty adventures for the RPGA, written web articles for Wizards of the Coast, and acted as a campaign administrator for the Living Greyhawk campaign. He is currently creating an online graphic novel, Snow-by-Night.

FORGOTTEN REALMS

ED GREENWOOD'S
Eye on the Realms

Masks of Living Flesh

By Ed Greenwood

Illustration by Spikytiger

Often used by outlaws and others being sought by authorities or vengeful private citizens, the jaod, or "mask of living flesh," is an unintelligent creature that adheres to the skin of a warm-blooded mammal and lives in symbiosis with its host. A wearer or assistant can shape a jaod so that its surface appearance is altered in limited ways. As a result, a jaod can augment one's bosom, replace missing digits or an extremity, reshape the torso, or—by far their most popular use—serve as a living, long-term face mask.

Named for Rinthrin Jaod, a sage of Cimbar who studied these creatures in the distant past, jaods have long served as the spies of a deity or perhaps a dragon, sent to watch from afar—or so Rinthrin theorized. In the wild, a jaod looks like an irregular, mottled hump of mud or bark a little larger than a foot in diameter. In texture, porosity, flexibility, and warmth, it resembles human flesh. Despite dozens of fireside tales that claim the contrary, jaods do not have eyes, mouths (fanged or otherwise), or retractable, gripping tentacles.

A jaod can sense light, heat, vibrations, and air disturbances caused by nearby movement, and it can detect the close presence of warm-blooded life. None think that jaods can reason, but some believe that they can remember creatures with which they have come into prolonged, direct contact. Some postulate, due to Rinthrin Jaod's experiments, that jaods in close proximity to each other (within twenty feet or so) can sense each other's presence (direction and distance) due to scent.

Gases pass freely through a jaod and don't affect it. For this reason, a jaod covering a face enables the host to breathe through it as if it weren't there. From a host, a jaod requires fluids, or rather the opportunity to cycle the host's bodily fluids through itself, taking in fresh blood and flushing away used blood. This process allows the jaod to take in oxygen and to release its few wastes back into the flow. These wastes aren't toxic to most warm-blooded life.

In the wild, a jaod adheres to a tree, a thick patch of moss, or the hide of a living creature. Though it can creep along nonslick surfaces (able to climb

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rocks and natural ice formations), it's thought that a jaod departs a dying host and climbs a tree to await the arrival of a similar-sized or larger creature. When a potential host approaches, the jaod falls on the creature, or if the creature rubs against a tree trunk on which the jaod rests, moves over during the process of rubbing.

While it's adhering to a plant, a jaod can tap its sap and absorb rainwater or other moisture such as mist and dew, but some scholars suggest that the jaod's wastes build up inside the host plant, slowly sickening it.

A jaod separated from its host gradually turns yellow and develops a gray crust. As time passes, it shrivels up, which cracks the crust as the jaod shrinks away from it. Its bodily toxins build up in the outermost layer, from which it then retreats. Yet a jaod apart from a host takes a long time to die, and many of them go dormant and survive for decades or centuries. When a host becomes an undead creature, an attached jaod dies immediately.

A jaod is born when a parent jaod grows large enough to split into two or more smaller children, who instinctively shun each other, rapidly moving apart. These offspring gain bulk slowly and exist for centuries. After a young jaod reaches a stable mass, it remains at that size, growing only to heal wounds and replace lost body mass, until an unknown trigger causes it to build up more mass suddenly and split into children.

Jaods need abundant blood, sap, or water to grow. They also need sunlight—not lamplight or firelight (and flames harm them, causing double normal damage)—and the nourishment provided by hair or fur. Most of the time this hair or fur comes from a host, but it can also be from clothing, a rug, pelts stored for sale, or some other nonliving source. Jaods dissolve and absorb these materials to increase their body mass as needed.

Forming False Flesh

A human or other intelligent host creature using a jaod as a body augmentation chooses a spot on his or her body to which to adhere the jaod, "paints" that spot with his or her own blood, places the creature in the location desired, then causes it to cling there by touching it with alcohol. The jaod sucks up the blood and cements itself to the flesh (or exposed tissues) it's touching, causing in the host a sensation that has been described as soothing waves of creeping tingling.

If the wearer of a jaod wants to alter the appearance of the jaod to make it appear to be human flesh, and to shape it, he or she douses or sprinkles the outer surface of the jaod with more alcohol, which causes the jaod to become pliable. It can be shaped by pulling and tugging at it as if were syrupy mud, so the wearer (or an assistant) can shape a nose, cheeks, a chin, or the like by manual manipulation. A scraper, a knife, or the hard edge of a handy object can smooth the jaod, and cosmetics or handy powders (spices, dust, dried and powdered dyes of all kinds, sand, or dirt) can tint it to match the flesh of the body to which it adheres. Such coloration is permanent until the next application of alcohol (such as a drink thrown into the face of a jaod-wearer in a brawl). A jaod begins to stiffen after contact with alcohol, so a nose formed from it won't droop; if it stiffens too much while being altered, application of more alcohol renders it pliable again for a few moments. Hair added to a jaod can form eyebrows, facial hair, and more when applied with a sure and patient hand.

If a mirror, a good painting, or a model is at hand, a person can fashion a jaod augmentation into a close likeness of the face or a body part of a specific individual, create a good counterfeit of eladrin ears for a human, make an apparent change in gender, simulate a wound, create the appearance of a skin condition, emulate simple clothing, and more.

Living with a Jaod

A jaod absorbs alcohol, acids, and natural venoms without harm, and neutralizes them so that their effects don't reach the jaod's host. Alcohol applied to a jaod has a particular effect (see below), but it does not make either the jaod or the host intoxicated or more flammable.

Jaods give off a subtle, short-range scent (only a handful of gnomes, halflings, and monsters can detect it) that repels insects. Fleas won't travel on a jaod or a jaod-wearer, and other insects not magically compelled to attack a jaod or a jaod-wearer won't sting, bite, or land on one. Legends to the contrary, jaods do not confer magical protection upon their wearers, nor do they absorb (or take) appreciable physical damage that would otherwise harm their hosts. A jaod that is stretched over the eyes of a wearer blinds the wearer's normal vision, but a jaod confers darkvision when covering healthy eyes.

Removal of a jaod is painless when alcohol is used first to loosen the jaod, after which the wearer or a trusted friend can start a slow process of gentle shifting and prying while continually applying more alcohol. If a jaod is torn swiftly and forcibly off a host, the jaod is unharmed, but the host suffers from the process. Due to the hundreds of tiny connections that the jaod creates to its host's blood vessels, being forcibly removed causes these connections to rip the skin, creating a moment of intense, searing pain. The former wearer then loses blood (takes 1 damage) and seeps more blood (ongoing 1 damage) until someone can treat the wound. After a forced removal, a raw, rashlike, purple-red wound covers the area where the jaod was attached for a day after the removal unless the former wearer seeks healing.

Legends of the Living Masks

The known truths about jaods are odd enough, but the stories that have been spread about them are stranger indeed. The wildest tales about jaods claim that they are evil, predatory creatures that subtly control those to whom they've attached themselves. Each one supposedly forces its wearer to seek out and attack a stronger potential host so the jaod can move to that creature. Some stories say that jaods suck away memories, blood, energy, and the souls of their hosts.

As a result of these stories, true or not, some people fear jaods and flee from them or seek to destroy them on sight, and a few eagerly seek to capture them so that they can use the creatures against enemies. One tale tells of a man who threw a jaod into the face of a foe in a tavern brawl, whereupon the "angered" jaod ate off the face it slammed into "in less time than it took the doomed man to try to scream." At least one wizard says this story might be true, because she met renegade Red Wizards lurking on the fringes of the Vilhon Wilds who had perfected spells delivered through small living beasts, which they threw at targets.

One claim made by many tales is true: For whatever reasons, these "living masks" are growing more numerous.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms® setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, plus he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which he has space left to pile up papers.

DARK SUN
CAMPAIGN SETTING

Eye on Dark Sun

The Eye of Abalach-Re

By Rodney Thompson

Illustration by Drew Pocza

The sorcerer-queen of Raam is considered to be amoral and callous. Many believe that her neglect of her office and her refusal to rule her city-state with any forcefulness borders on cruelty. "Ambition" and "cunning" are words rarely used to refer to Abalach-Re, and observers expect the queen's rule to be toppled at any moment. However, those who think Abalach-Re's mind has been dulled by years of self-indulgence are lulled into the same complacency that has thwarted many of her enemies. Few remember the tale of the Eye of Abalach-Re, but those who do often relate it as a warning to others not to underestimate the sorcerer-queen.

Centuries ago, before the fall of Kalidnay, the sorcerer-queen of Raam hatched a plan to destroy the reigning Dragon of Tyr so that she could complete her transformation and become the new Dragon. To that end, she took one of the greatest jewels in her treasury, a diamond said to be the size of an overgrown potion fruit, and began enchanting it so that it would poison the dragon with the same defiling magic the Dragon used to sustain itself. Thanks to this enchantment, the gem turned into the object known as the Eye of Abalach-Re, the only purpose of which was to destroy the most powerful creature on Athas.

Tales of the Eye tend to embellish the great sacrifices and dark magic that went into enchanting the gem. But these exaggerations contain an element of truth. Abalach-Re designed the enchantment by experimenting on the people of her city until she had created a spell that corroded the life force of a defiler in the same way that defiling magic corrodes the life force of the natural world. It is said that the templars who aided her in the research were killed, but some believe that the only way the story of the Eye could have become known was if one or more of those templars had escaped. If that is the case, knowledge of the spell's creation might be found in an obscure location where a mansabdar or a kuotagha once lived in exile from Raam.

With the enchantment complete, Abalach-Re sent a group of skilled kuotagha to infiltrate Ur Draxa, the fortress city at the center of the Valley of Dust and Fire in the Sea of Silt that also serves as the Dragon's abode. The kuotagha entered the city

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and spread word among its citizens that Kalid-Ma of Kalidnay was preparing a special sacrifice in tribute to the Dragon of Tyr in a temple under construction in the Great Alluvial Sand Wastes north of Kalidnay. The goal was to sow the seed of a rumor that would lure the Dragon to the place where the Eye was waiting.

The builder of the temple was not Kalidnay but Abalach-Re, who installed dozens of slaves inside the place as bait when the construction was finished. Inside the temple rested the Eye. Despite the queen's efforts at deception, however, the Dragon was not fooled. The Dragon called forth a great storm that swept over the temple, burying it in the sands of the desert. The Eye of Abalach-Re was lost, and the sorcerer-queen dared not attempt to recover it lest she be implicated in the plot to destroy the dragon.

Years passed, and the Eye of Abalach-Re faded into legend, forgotten by all but the sorcerer-queen and a few diligent sages and researchers. Those who do know of the Eye consider it one of the great lost treasures of the world, an artifact of legend that will bring wealth and power to anyone who finds it. Treasure hunters across Athas seek out the Eye, and whenever a rumor of its location arises, everyone from nobles to merchant houses launches an expedition.

The Temple of the Eye

The temple in which Abalach-Re placed the Eye was a simple structure, a purported place of sacrifice to the Dragon of Tyr. The storm that the Dragon called forth so consumed the structure, however, that it has been lost to the world ever since.

Over the years, the sands of Athas shift and roil, and from time to time the Temple of the Eye or a part of it is exposed. It rarely stays so for long before the windblown sand buries the place again. More confusing, it appears that the temple moves, because anyone who finds it once seemingly never finds it in the same spot again. In truth, it is the landmarks around the temple that shift, with dunes rising and falling and the shifting sand erasing any tracks in the area and confusing everyone's sense of direction. Nothing supernatural is at work.

Abalach-Re built the Temple of the Eye hastily, and therefore the temple is small by the standard of other structures built by the sorcerer-kings. It was originally a two-story edifice above the ground, with a third subterranean level that included a teleportation circle used by Abalach-Re's templars during the construction. During the Dragon's onslaught, parts of the upper two floors collapsed and the interior of the structure filled with sand. When the temple is exposed, the sand dunes still lead right up to walls and flow into the entrances, and in some cases only the upper floor is accessible.

Of course, the temple was not empty when it was buried by the dragon's sandstorm. Inside were dozens of slaves, as well as a few mansabdars whom Abalach-Re wanted to be rid of. Those slaves have become undead creatures, including zombies and raaigs, so that any who accidentally stumble upon the temple seldom escape those perils. The Eye of Abalach-Re is not only hidden in the desert sands, it's guarded by the restless dead that rose up because of the sorcerer-queen's machinations.

Shaqat Beetles

Since the fall of Kalidnay, another kind of creature has taken up residence in the Temple of the Eye: the shaqat beetle. These three-inch-long insects have strong mandibles and barbed legs, enabling them to clamp onto and cling to animals and other prey. Shaqat beetles are native to the region around Kalidnay. After that city-state's destruction, the beetles became carriers of a rare form of psionic parasite. It is thought that agents of the Shom merchant house infected the beetles with cerebral parasites intentionally.

Lore

Nature DC 20: Shaqat beetles are large insects identifiable by their orange carapaces with black stripes. Although shaqat beetles are no more harmful than other desert vermin in most ways, they are carriers of a cerebral parasite that can sap the strength of psionic practitioners and slowly burn out their minds. Shaqat beetles are native to scrub plains and mud flats, but they can quickly migrate to other regions when attached to animals.

Encounters

Shaqat beetles are mindless creatures with a strong survival instinct. They can be encountered in remote, deserted regions of Athas, whereas civilized areas have ways of warding against the pests. Shaqat beetles might burrow up out of the sand during a skirmish, attracted by the sounds of battle above, or might be incidental passengers latched onto mekillots or erdlus.

Shaqat Beetle Swarm	**Level 13 Lurker**
Medium natural beast (swarm)	XP 800
HP 102; **Bloodied** 51	**Initiative** +16
AC 27, **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 22	**Perception** +13
Speed 8, burrow 4	Tremorsense 5
Resist half damage from melee and ranged attacks; **Vulnerable** 10 against close and area attacks	

Traits

Swarm

The swarm can occupy the same square as another creature, and an enemy can enter its space, which is difficult terrain. The swarm cannot be pulled, pushed, or slid by melee or ranged attacks. It can squeeze through any opening that is large enough for a Tiny creature.

Standard Actions

Latch On ✦ At-Will

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +18 vs. AC

Hit: The swarm grabs the target (escape DC 20). Until the grab ends, the target takes ongoing 10 damage. The target takes 10 damage when the grab ends.

Infected Bite (disease, poison, psychic) **✦ At-Will**

Attack: Melee 0 (one creature grabbed by the swarm); +16 vs. Fortitude

Hit: 1d4 + 8 damage plus 4d10 poison and psychic damage.

Miss: Half damage.

Effect: At the end of the encounter, the target makes a saving throw. On a failure, the target contracts cerebral parasites (stage 2).

Move Actions

Jump ✦ At-Will

Effect: The swarm jumps up to 2 squares. If the swarm ends this jump in the same square as another creature, it gains combat advantage against that creature until the end of the current turn.

Skills Stealth +17

Str 4 (+3)	**Dex** 22 (+12)	**Wis** 15 (+8)
Con 18 (+10)	**Int** 2 (+2)	**Cha** 4 (+3)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** none

Shaqat Beetles in Combat

Shaqat beetles prefer to remain hidden and then leap out at their prey. A swarm might try to close the distance to a target by burrowing underground, then emerging from underneath the creature. Shaqat beetles latch onto their prey with large mandibles that secrete a numbing and mind-dulling agent. When a creature tries to brush off or rip away a swarm of these creatures, the results are bloody and painful.

Cerebral Parasites

Shaqat beetles carry a rare psionic affliction commonly known as cerebral parasites. These tiny organisms feed on psionic energy, and when they infect a host they can quickly siphon off that energy, leaving the victim .

Cerebral Parasites	Level 13 Disease

These tiny specks of psionic energy are nearly invisible to the naked eye.

Stage 0: The target recovers from the disease.

Stage 1: While affected by stage 1, the target loses 1 newly regained power point after each short or extended rest.

Stage 2: While affected by stage 2, the target loses 1 power point each time it uses its own power points to augment a psionic power. The lost points can be regained normally.

Stage 3: While affected by stage 3, the target loses 1 power point each time it uses its own power points to augment a psionic power. The lost power points can be regained normally. Furthermore, after each short or extended rest, the target loses a healing surge unless it spends 4 power points.

Stage 4: While affected by stage 4, the target loses all of its power points and cannot regain them by any means. Only a Remove Affliction ritual can remove the disease at this stage.

Check: At the end of each extended rest, the target makes an Arcana check if it is at stage 1, 2, or 3.

13 or Lower: The stage of the disease increases by one.

14–19: No change.

20 or Higher: The stage of the disease decreases by one.

About the Author

Rodney Thompson is an RPG designer at Wizards of the Coast, originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee. His credits for the Dungeons & Dragons® game include *Monster Manual*® 3, the *Dark Sun*® *Campaign Setting*, *Heroes of the Fallen Lands*™, *Heroes of the Forgotten Kingdoms*™, and *Monster Vault*™.

EBERRON

Eye on Eberron

Kyrzin, The Prince of Slime

By Keith Baker

Illustration by Drew Pocza

"Drip. Drip. Mold in the water. Mold on the walls. The scratch in your throat and the drip in your nose. The Prince is with us. Can you hear him?"

–Luhr'Oshac the Moldscraper

The people of Khorvaire know that reality is fragile. The walls between the planes can fall at any time. Nightmares are real. Ancient fiends are bound in the underworld, and who can say just how long those bonds will hold?

Every nation deals with its fears in different ways. In Karrnath, the dead are bound to serve the living. The Church of the Silver Flame provides a source of hope, and yet in some places its light doesn't shine. For instance, the Shadow Marches remains on the fringes of civilization, beyond the Code of Galifar and the influence of the church. The people of the Marches know stories older than human civilization on Khorvaire: tales of the goblin empire and the lords of madness that destroyed it. Each generation, mothers tell their children how Belashyrra steals the eyes of boys and girls who don't finish their klurhn roots. Though the Lord of Eyes is well known in the stories of the Marches, another daelkyr has still greater influence in the region: Kyrzin, the Prince of Slime.

Kyrzin Lore

An adventurer from the Shadow Marches knows the information presented in the Dungeoneering DC 20 entry and gains a +5 bonus to all other checks about Kyrzin.

Dungeoneering DC 20: Anyone raised in the murky swamps of the west knows tales of the Prince of Slime. Those few who know his true name do not speak it. He is also known as the Bile Lord and the Lurker Within; members of the Gibbering Clans call him the Regent of Whispers. The ferry workers of the Glum River tell stories of the Prince of Slime's children, which are great oozes that roam the bottom of the river. Those who follow the druidic traditions say that the Prince of Slime is a fiend

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who seeks to devour all natural things. Others say that one can learn secrets in his gibbering—secrets so wondrous that they blast the minds of most mortals who hear them. Some believe that death at the hands of his creations isn't death at all but rather an escape from Dolurrh and the Keeper.

Dungeoneering DC 30: Kyrzin is a daelkyr, one of the lords of the Far Realm of Xoriat. He created the gibbering beasts and the mimics, and he has a great affinity for slimes and oozes of all kinds. While the daelkyr devoted most of their resources to destroying the vast goblin empire, Kyrzin focused his energy on the orcs of the west. He is an expert in biological warfare, and he can infect his enemies with parasitic oozes.

Dungeoneering DC 35: Kyrzin has a humanoid shape with the head and upper torso of a handsome male human; however, his body is composed of ooze and his human aspects are partially dissolved. He cannot speak, but his telepathic powers make this method of communication unnecessary; he is surrounded by a constant telepathic babble similar to the whispers of gibbering beasts. He can engulf enemies in living slime and inflict terrible diseases with a thought. Two separate legends describe his defeat and destruction at the hands of heroes; if they are true, it means that he can reconstitute himself after death in some manner.

Religion DC 30: A character who succeeds on this check knows the nature and traditions of the Gibbering Cults, as described below in "Cults of Slime."

The Horror Within

Kyrzin has spectacular and fearsome abilities, to be sure, but what makes him even more terrifying is the subtle weapon he has at his disposal in the form of far. In parts of the Marches, the common cold is known as the bile-curse or the Prince's kiss, because in an earlier time people there feared that any trace of unusual mucus was an indicator of Kyrzin's presence. They had good reason to be apprehensive, because Kyrzin has bred a host of parasitic oozes that can live within another creature.

A parasitic ooze can enter a host in two ways. A willing victim can allow a mature ooze to enter its body through the mouth. The more insidious way is for it to be transmitted along with another disease. Kyrzin can adapt almost any disease into a vector for infection; the primary signs of one of his infections are excessive mucus of unusual color and vivid fever dreams as the disease progresses. If the disease runs its course to the final state, it appears to pass completely, and the victim appears healthy; however, the victim now harbors a parasitic ooze.

Many kinds of parasitic ooze exist. The most invasive is the brain borer slime. This sentient ooze devours the brain of the victim and replaces it, assuming full control of the host. In the process of consuming the brain, the borer gains all of its host's memories and skills. Small signs of the change include subtle shifts in body language, a difficulty displaying tender emotions, and quiet gibbering at night, but otherwise the victim can pass most tests any set to determine whether the victim is who he or she claims to be. If a borer's victim is slain, the borer dies with it.

Other parasites exert less control over the victim but can pose a greater physical threat. They project raw emotions to the host, causing anger or irritability, but they cannot control their victims. However, if the host is slain, the ooze emerges from the body 1 round later, acting on the host's initiative count. As such, an encounter that appears to be an easy challenge against a number of minions can become an unpleasant surprise as a black pudding pours out of a corpse. If commanded to do so by a brain borer or a priest of Kyrzin, a parasitic ooze can eat its way out of a living host. While doing so, it scores a critical hit each round against the host with its basic attack, and it emerges when the victim has taken damage equal to or greater than his or her bloodied value. Any sort of ooze can be adapted to this parasitic form, but it must be the same size as or smaller than the host. So, a Medium green slime could nest inside a normal human, but a Large gelatinous cube would have to hide inside a giant.

If an adventurer is infected with a parasitic ooze, a Remove Affliction ritual can rid the character of it. Most parasitic oozes lack the ability to perceive such a ritual as a threat, so they don't try to escape during this time. Nothing can keep the victim of a brain borer alive (the effect on the target is always death), but after the ooze is removed, the victim can be raised.

Cults of Slime

Before humans ever came to the Marches, the orcs were divided between the druidic practices of the Gatekeepers and the worship of the Dragon Below. Both traditions continue today. Even those who have become vassals of the Sovereign Host might offer a sacrifice to the Bile Lord when a child has fluid in his or her lungs, rather than trusting entirely to Arawai or Olladra.

Outsiders find it difficult to understand why anyone would worship the Prince of Slime. Many Marchers make offerings solely out of fear, hoping that through their devotions they can keep Kyrzin from rising, or that his wrath will pass over them when he returns. Such people aren't truly cultists, but they can be pressured to assist agents of the Prince of Slime. Others see Kyrzin as a benevolent entity. In certain parts of the Marches, mold and lichen are valuable crops harvested as food or for their medicinal properties. Although the Prince of Slime might infect his enemies with disease, it's also well known that the right molds can eliminate infections.

The oldest cults, known as the gibbering clans or the Gibberers, are driven by a blend of madness and tradition. These ancient families are scattered across the Marches. The name comes from their practice of

cultivating gibbering beasts. Every clan community has one or more gibbering beasts hidden away, and when a member of the community falls ill or reaches a certain age, that individual is ritually sacrificed to the beast. Members of a gibbering clan have wild eyes and a tendency to fall into ecstatic babbling trances, but they aren't innately evil or united behind a single purpose; many of the clans have long-standing feuds with one another. The Gibberers believe that their souls live on in the beasts, and that in this way Kyrzin has given them the gift of immortality. Priests spend hours each day listening to the babbling of the clan beasts, and they claim to hear the words of their elders or of Kyrzin.

The most active cults are those established by brain-bored agents of the Prince of Slime. Brain borer cults are Kyrzin's active forces and are supplemented by oozes and aberrations. Kyrzin's cults employ dolgaunts, dolgrims, and dolgarrs; compared to the troops of other daelkyr, Kyrzin's are noteworthy for having slick, translucent skin and for carrying parasitic oozes. Every brain borer cult is different, though, since priests seize on local tensions to stir passions. They are united by their fervor and frequently are enhanced by consuming psychoactive molds; followers are driven by wild visions and passions, as well as promises or goals that rarely make rational sense.

The Gifts of the Prince

Those favored by the Lord of Bile wear and wield living tools crafted from protoplasm. These items are functionally equivalent to objects made from leather or steel, but their unusual appearance might be a hindrance in some locations, and the living nature of such an object can add interesting flavor. For example: "Your armor's feeling gloomy today. It's covered in a layer of condensation, and you think these are tears."

Armor: Ooze armor can exist in any form; for instance, heavy ooze is thick and dense. The characteristics of specific magic armor can be related to the nature of the ooze. For instance, ooze armor in the form of *sylvan armor* has chameleon properties and provides a surge of adrenaline to enhance Athletics. *Lifegiving armor* and *immunizing armor* bond to the wearer's nervous system to enhance healing, while *slick armor* is just that: slick. *Imposter's armor* is especially common among Kyrzin's cultists, and it transforms in a manner similar to that of a mimic.

Weapons: Weapons crafted by Kyrzin are built on a core of sinew and protoplasm. *Dynamic weapons* are common, shifting to new forms at the wielder's command. Enhancements tied to poison or acid damage create their own venoms. Regardless of enhancements, Kyrzin's weapons shapeshift in minor ways; the extra damage from a critical hit reflects the weapon literally digging deeper into the wound.

Other Items: *Eagle eye goggles* bond with the wearer's eyes. A *periapt of proof against poison* consumes venom before it can hurt the wearer. As long as the organic nature of the item is reflected in its flavor, any magic item can be used.

Kyrzin's treasures should pose an interesting question for adventurers. These items are as powerful as those made of mundane materials, and nothing is innately evil about the object. Are adventurers comfortable wielding these living tools, though?

Using Kyrzin

Kyrzin is an epic-level threat, and adventurers won't be prepared to face the Prince of Slime until they are well on their way to achieving their epic destinies. So what role can Kyrzin play in a campaign?

As with all of the daelkyr, Kyrzin is a force of madness. Ultimately his actions might lead to the destruction of the Gatekeepers, the breaking of the seals to Khyber, or a similar action that helps him in a concrete manner. Initial encounters with his followers, however, might appear to be entirely unconnected. Here are some possibilities.

- Adventurers passing through the Marches stop in an inn serving fine graymold stew. At night they hear whispers in the basement and face the gibbering mouther dwelling there. The innkeeper is horrified, since these creatures have slain generations of his ancestors.
- The gibbering clans have begun a campaign of aggression. They could target House Tharashk, push toward war between the Marches and Droaam, or intend to bar all foreigners from the Marches. The priests are being driven to this action by the voices they hear when listening to the gibbering beasts; they don't know any larger reason for their actions.
- A mysterious fever is spreading in the villages of western Breland. The village elders refuse to let House Jorasco treat it, and the victims all recover (or seem to). Can the adventurers expose the brain borers behind this fever before the disease is successfully transformed into a plague that can be carried across Breland? Aberrant forces and parasitic oozes emerge to fight as needed.
- Brain borers can spread into any part of Khorvaire. A Tharashk clan begins smuggling a psychoactive mold into major cities, and the mold serves as a vector for brain borer infection. Can the adventurers expose this plot? How deep does it go into the roots of House Tharashk?

About the Author

Keith Baker is an award-winning game designer and novelist best known for his work on the *Eberron® Campaign Setting* and the card game *Gloom*. His most recent novel is *The Fading Dream*, the third in the Thorn of Breland series. Follow Keith on Twitter as @HellcowKeith.

Monster Manual Update:
Gibbering Beast

By Logan Bonner

Illustration by Thomas M. Baxa and Pete Venters

A mass of pulsating, oozelike flesh writhes. It spouts mad gibberish from its many mouths, and it stares in all directions with bugged-out, alien eyes.

Gibbering beasts are like madness made flesh. The unnatural essence of the Far Realm comes to horrid life in their amorphous, shifting forms. To encounter a gibbering creature is to face nonsense and chaos—a creature that has no place in the world and feels utterly, gut-wrenchingly wrong. Few people survive encounters with gibbering beasts, and even fewer of those retain their sanity.

Incessant Nonsense: Gibbering beasts get their name from the garbled chatter that constantly flows from the creature's dozens or hundreds of misshapen mouths. The sound is a mix of humanlike voices, animal noises, and sounds impossible for any natural creature to replicate. Occasionally, a gibbering beast speaks snippets that seem to make sense. These short phrases can be in any number of languages, and might take the form of warnings or clues. It's impossible to predict whether a gibbering beast's words will come true. Psionic scholars believe the words aren't even spoken at all; they're simply brought forth from the minds of the people who hear them, a product

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of the same kind of psychic static that surrounds so many creatures of the Far Realm.

Birthed from Flesh and Madness: Gibbering beasts arise in places where the Far Realm intrudes into the natural world. When a sentient creature dies in such a foul place, its flesh can distort as its face tears loose and congeals into a nascent gibbering beast. A faceless corpse with warped flesh and bones is evidence of the birthplace of a gibbering beast. There's no predictable path for the beast's development into maturity—the creatures don't follow the rules of nature—but one tends to go through a stage of rapid growth whenever it consumes the flesh and blood of another sentient creature. The beasts take on more than just flesh. Their gibbering voices grow more diverse, more insane, each time another creature is consumed.

Sbix grpligar. Nxfgasz! Shffu shffu. Ordorx ia! Naaaaaaaaar! Theren betray! Hrmlrmara nt zyx!

-a gibbering mouther

The formidable gibbering orbs present more of a mystery. They seem to be native to the Far Realm, but rumors suggest they might be highly advanced gibbering mouthers or gibbering beasts formed from dead gods or primordials. A gibbering orb follows some sort of odd agenda that makes sense only when the creature is observed over a long period of time.

Reality Warps: Gibbering beasts appear to be from a different world, never quite adhering to the rules of reality and always seeming out of place. The earth around a gibbering mouther seems to recoil at its very presence. Stone and earth turn to a doughy substance, similar to quicksand, that gives way under the weight of other creatures. A gibbering orb's eye rays can warp flesh and deform bones, contorting them into inhuman shapes. The gibbering beasts themselves suffer this effect far more than denizens of the world around them do; their bodies constantly shift form, and their eyes, mouths, and tentacles appear and disappear frequently.

Dwellers in Inhospitable Reaches: Places touched by the Far Realm lie far from civilization. Gibbering beasts writhe through freezing underground caverns as well as bubbling acidic swamps. Two phenomena offer clues that a gibbering mouther might be nearby. First, the stone and earth are altered, turned soft where the mouther passed through. Second, the creature causes the floor and walls around it to heat up, creating warm edifices or even steam in cold locations. Gibbering beasts prefer to eat flesh and blood, but they can devour any sort of animal, vegetable, or mineral. No one can tell whether they have an actual need to eat, but to a gibbering beast and its prey, such a determination hardly matters.

Gibbering Mouther **Level 10 Controller**
Medium aberrant magical beast XP 500

HP 110; **Bloodied** 55 **Initiative** +7
AC 24, **Fortitude** 24, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 22 **Perception** +4
Speed 5, swim 5 All-around vision, darkvision

Traits

Warped Ground ✦ Aura 3
Squares in the aura are difficult terrain for enemies.

All-Around Vision
Enemies can't gain combat advantage by flanking the gibbering mouther.

Standard Actions

Bite (acid) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage, and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends).

Gibbering Feast (acid) **✦ Recharge** ⚅
Attack: Close burst 5 (dazed creatures in the burst); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 5 damage, and ongoing 5 acid damage (save ends).

Free Actions

Gibbering ✦ At-Will
Trigger: The gibbering mouther starts its turn.
Attack: Close burst 5 (nondeafened creatures in the burst); +13 vs. Will
Hit: The target is dazed until the end of the gibbering mouther's next turn.

Str 19 (+9)	**Dex** 14 (+7)	**Wis** 8 (+4)
Con 22 (+11)	**Int** 4 (+2)	**Cha** 18 (+9)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Gibbering Abomination **Level 18 Controller**
Medium aberrant magical beast XP 2,000

HP 168; **Bloodied** 84 **Initiative** +13
AC 32, **Fortitude** 31, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 30 **Perception** +13
Speed 6, fly 4 (hover, altitude limit 1) All-around vision, darkvision

Traits

Unnatural Utterances ✦ Aura 5
Enemies take a -2 penalty to attack rolls while in the aura.

All-Around Vision
Enemies can't gain combat advantage by flanking the gibbering abomination.

Combat Advantage
Whenever the gibbering abomination hits a creature granting combat advantage to it with a melee or a ranged attack, the abomination deals 2d6 extra psychic damage to that creature.

Standard Actions

Tentacles (psychic) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +23 vs. AC
Hit: 3d6 + 10 damage, and ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends).

Eye of Despair (psychic) **✦ Recharge** ⚃ ⚄ ⚅
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +21 vs. Will
Hit: 4d8 + 10 psychic damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

Free Actions

Gibbering ✦ At-Will
Trigger: The gibbering abomination starts its turn.
Attack: Close burst 5 (nondeafened creatures in the burst); +21 vs. Will
Hit: The target is dazed until the end of the abomination's next turn.

Str 20 (+14)	**Dex** 18 (+13)	**Wis** 19 (+13)
Con 16 (+12)	**Int** 11 (+9)	**Cha** 12 (+10)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Gibbering Orb **Level 27 Solo Controller**
Huge aberrant magical beast XP 55,000

HP 984; **Bloodied** 492 **Initiative** +22
AC 41, **Fortitude** 38, **Reflex** 39, **Will** 40 **Perception** +20
Speed 0, fly 8 (hover) All-around vision, darkvision
Saving Throws +5; **Action Points** 2

Traits

Merciless Eyes ✦ Aura 5
When an enemy starts its turn in the aura and in the gibbering orb's line of sight, the gibbering orb uses one random eye ray against that enemy.

All-Around Vision
Enemies can't gain combat advantage by flanking the gibbering orb.

Standard Actions

Bite ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +32 vs. AC
Hit: 6d6 + 14 damage, and one of the orb's mouths detaches and repeats this attack against the target at the start of each of the orb's turns. The mouth falls off when one of these attacks misses.

Eye Rays ✦ At-Will
Effect: The gibbering orb uses two of the following eye rays, each against a different target. This attack does not provoke opportunity attacks.
1. *Mindcarving Ray* (psychic): Ranged 10; +30 vs. Will; 3d8 + 11 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).
2. *Flesheating Ray* (necrotic): Ranged 10; +30 vs. Fortitude; 3d8 + 11 necrotic damage, and ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends).
3. *Bonewarping Ray*: Ranged 10; +30 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 8 damage, and the target is weakened (save ends).
4. *Bloodfeasting Ray*: Ranged 10; +30 vs. Reflex; 3d8 + 11 damage, and ongoing 10 damage (save ends).
5. *Farsending Ray* (psychic): Ranged 10; +30 vs. Reflex; the target is removed from play until the end of the gibbering orb's next turn, when it reappears in the same space (or the nearest unoccupied space if that space is occupied). When it returns, the target takes 3d8 + 11 psychic damage, and takes a -5 penalty to saving throws until the end of the encounter.
6. *Souleating Ray* (necrotic): Ranged 10; +30 vs. Will; 2d8 + 8 necrotic damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).
First Failed Saving Throw: The target is immobilized instead of slowed (save ends).
Second Failed Saving Throw: The target dies.

Free Actions

Gibbering ✦ At-Will
Trigger: The gibbering orb starts its turn.
Attack: Close burst 5 (nondeafened creatures in the burst); +30 vs. Will
Hit: The target is dazed until the end of the gibbering orb's next turn.

Str 27 (+21)	**Dex** 28 (+22)	**Wis** 15 (+15)
Con 22 (+19)	**Int** 17 (+15)	**Cha** 31 (+23)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** –

Author Bio

Logan Bonner's credits include *The Slaying Stone*™ and *Monster Vault*™. He lives in the Seattle area and works as a freelance game designer, writer, and editor. You can follow him on Twitter, where he's @loganbonner.

Monster Manual Update: Chuul

By Logan Bonner

Illustrations by Wayne Reynolds and Francis Tsai

Massive, hard-shelled chuuls lurk just below the water in murky swamps. With one touch of a chuul's tentacles, a victim is paralyzed, unable to escape a grisly death between the creature's claws.

Chuuls want only two things: to be left alone and to eat people. Fortunately for the creatures, when the first want is denied, the other is usually fulfilled. Chuuls coexist peacefully with only a small subset of creatures, and intruding on their terrain is extremely dangerous.

Like many aberrant creatures, chuuls have psychic powers, but they rarely access those abilities early in their life cycle. As chuuls age, they begin to exude psychic static as they gain limited control over their natural psychic powers.

Aquatic Lairs: Chuuls live in small groups, called pods, in bodies of still water large enough to support the pod. They use rivers and even oceans to travel, but they prefer to settle in swamps, jungle lakes, and underground seas. Some find comfort in lairs closer to urban areas, such as a sewer tunnel or a shipwreck near a coastline, since those sites provide a more accessible food supply. Some chuuls, especially older ones, create lairs by digging up lake bottoms and building rudimentary structures from trees and stones. Chuuls construct these lairs as a series of roughly circular rooms (including a trophy room) connected by tunnels just big enough for the largest chuul in the pod to squeeze through.

Egg Layers: Chuuls hatch from clusters of slimy, yellow-green eggs. Adults lay egg sacs only rarely, so they viciously protect them. They are also intelligent enough to understand the value in protecting the egg sacs of other chuuls in their pod. In environments that offer little food, adult chuuls collect humanoid prisoners to feed to hatchlings. Chuuls have been known to attach egg sacs to the undersides of ships and rafts to spread their race to new lands.

Susceptible to Mutation: Polluted water, planar rifts, and magical experimentation alter chuuls much more easily than they do other creatures. Aberrant spellcasters love to experiment on their six-legged kin, warping them into bizarre servants and fully unlocking the chuuls' mental powers. Even chuuls that aren't altered in this way still display mutations, such as growing to immense size or becoming poisonous.

"I fought a chuul once. My sword bounced right off its carapace! It still has that sword—and the arm I swung it with."

—"Lefty" Lormengard

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Hatred of Humanoids: These aberrant creatures are born with a racial memory, clearly recalling events from the previous generation and able to access cloudier information from far back in the race's history. The memories deliver one clear message: Hate the humans. Kill them. Chuuls will attack humans (and elves, dwarves, halflings, or other intelligent humanoids of similar ilk) whenever they have the opportunity. They do not prey on other aberrants or subterranean creatures. Chuuls ally with mind flayers, grimlocks, and troglodytes against surface-dwellers.

Chuul	**Level 10 Soldier**
Large aberrant magical beast (aquatic)	XP 500
HP 109; **Bloodied** 54	**Initiative** +10
AC 26, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 21	**Perception** +9
Speed 6, swim 6	Darkvision
Traits	
Aquatic	
The chuul can breathe underwater. In aquatic combat, it gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against nonaquatic creatures.	
Tentacle Net (poison)	
A creature hit by the chuul's opportunity attack is immobilized until the end of the chuul's next turn.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Claw** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +15 vs. AC	
Hit: 2d6 + 6 damage, or 4d6 + 6 if the target is immobilized.	
⸸ **Double Attack** (poison) ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The chuul uses *claw* twice. If both attacks hit the same creature, the chuul makes a secondary attack against it.	
Secondary Attack: +13 vs. Fortitude.	
Hit: The target is immobilized until the end of the chuul's next turn.	
Str 22 (+11) **Dex** 16 (+8) **Wis** 18 (+9)	
Con 21 (+10) **Int** 4 (+2) **Cha** 14 (+7)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Deep Speech	

Trophy Collectors: Born hoarders, chuuls keep trophies from their kills. Shining armor, glittering amulets, and well-crafted saddles can all be found in chuul hoards. The creatures are savvy enough to barter, but only when they are offered captive humanoids or other delicacies. If a victim carries no treasure or trinkets, the chuul keeps and displays its skull. The one part of a humanoid that a chuul never keeps is the brain. Brains are poisonous to them, so they either discard them far from the lair or trade them to mind flayers.

Chuul Juggernaut	**Level 23 Elite Soldier**
Huge aberrant magical beast (aquatic)	XP 10,200
HP 434; **Bloodied** 217	**Initiative** +17
AC 39, **Fortitude** 37, **Reflex** 33, **Will** 35	**Perception** +17
Speed 7, swim 7	Darkvision
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1	
Traits	
☼ **Psychic Moan** ✦ **Aura** 1	
Enemies take a -2 penalty to Will and gain vulnerable 5 psychic while in the aura.	
Aquatic	
The chuul can breathe underwater. In aquatic combat, it gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls against nonaquatic creatures.	
Tentacle Net (poison)	
A creature hit by the chuul's opportunity attack is immobilized until the end of the chuul's next turn.	
Standard Actions	
⊕ **Claw** ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 3 (one creature); +28 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d8 + 17 damage, or 5d8 + 17 if the target is immobilized.	
⸸ **Double Attack** (poison) ✦ **At-Will**	
Effect: The chuul uses *claw* twice. If both attacks hit the same creature, the chuul makes a secondary attack against it.	
Secondary Attack: +26 vs. Fortitude	
Hit: The target is immobilized (save ends).	
⚸ **Psychic Lure** (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one or two creatures); +26 vs. Will	
Hit: 2d10 + 20 psychic damage, and the chuul pulls the target up to 5 squares.	
Str 27 (+19) **Dex** 19 (+15) **Wis** 22 (+17)	
Con 25 (+18) **Int** 4 (+8) **Cha** 16 (+14)	
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Deep Speech	

About the Author

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Monster Manual Update: Grell

By Logan Bonner

Illustration by Alexey Aparin and Francis Tsai

Flying, tentacled grells hunt their prey through dark, underground corridors. Though they psychically perceive the minds of the living, the monstrosities sense nothing more than another meal.

Grells have two priorities: colonizing new lands and eating. Instinct drives them to increase their numbers and extend their sway over as much territory as possible, but their intellect lets them plan their conquests better than any pack of predatory beasts can. Grells fall somewhere in the middle among aberrant creatures: They aren't genius schemers as mind flayers are, nor are they utterly insane beasts like carrion crawlers. They have the intelligence of humans, but follow alien motivations that cause many of them to live and hunt like animals.

Lives Spent in the Dark: Grells detest sunlight and avoid the surface world. Their ability to navigate without sight lets them pass through the unlit realms easily, and their psychic senses help them hunt down their prey. They hate to give up their natural advantages by going aboveground. The monsters originally hail from the Far Realm, but have infested the Underdark of every plane. That place's enormous caverns can hold vast colonies of grells, providing plenty of room for them to feast and practice their alien alchemy. In the Shadowdark, they are especially plentiful. The most ancient grells live there, devouring even the largest and most dangerous of subterranean beasts.

Eaters of Flesh: To grells, humanoids provide fresh meat—nothing more. Infiltrating societies, influencing affairs in the aboveground world, and amassing legions of slaves holds no appeal for the average grell. The larger and older a grell, the larger the creatures it hunts, and an adult humanoid provides the right amount of sustenance for a full-grown grell. When a grell kills a victim, it first cracks open the skull with its calcified beak. It removes the brain, since that organ is poisonous to a grell. Usually, the brain gets discarded immediately, but a grell colony might save brains if they know of mind flayers that live nearby. Then the grell devours the rest of the body, including the bones. Though grells don't worship deities, they show deference to "great devourers," from the destructive tarrasque to the imprisoned Chained God.

The Wild and the Civilized: An insular and reclusive race, grells don't live among other creatures. They might join a fight alongside other monsters in order to snag an easier meal, but they quickly disappear back to the nest or the colony with their meals. Many grells are feral and solitary, and the rest gather in colonies numbering from four to twelve members (though some populations can reach as high as fifty). There's no animosity between

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the two types. A grell is a grell, and each considers the decision to live and hunt alone or in a group a matter of personal taste. Feral grells live away from cities, making their lairs in wet caves near roads. The creatures pick off wanderers, either those who venture into the caves in search of water or fools traveling at night. The creatures are intelligent enough to move on after a time before the road gets a reputation for being haunted and the food supply dries up.

Grell Colonies: Grells form colonies only in the Underdark. Occasionally, colonies keep herds of humanoid livestock to make feeding easier. None of these captives survives for long, except for the treacherous few who lead other humanoids into the grells' clutches. Their society is divided into soldier, philosopher, and patriarch castes based on age and knowledge. Though a single grell defers to the wishes of a higher-caste member of the colony, any major decision is put to a vote that involves all adult members. Most grells fall within the soldier caste, and few colonies contain the powerful elder patriarchs. Philosophers stand out from their fellows, melding magic with their knowledge of the Far Realm in strange experiments. On the rare occasion when a colony pursues an agenda, it's at the prodding of the colony's philosophers.

Alchemy of the Far Realm: Grell philosophers practice a strange sort of magic referred to as grell alchemy. It mixes the study of arcane magic with alchemical formulas and natural science, but all following a bizarre set of rules. Instead of adhering to the ways of the natural world (or any of the other planes), grell alchemy draws on the laws that govern the Far Realm, such as they are. A creation of grell alchemy is not a spell, nor is it an alchemical formula. No words can describe it, and no one but the grells and other aberrant creatures can harness its power.

When using grell alchemy, a philosopher first coats parts of its body in alchemical powders or lotions. It then gestures with its tentacles and utters a series of screeching, chittering sounds. The effects are usually subtle. Grell alchemy could be used to cloud the minds of a grell's prey, or to warp the surrounding environment by subjecting it to the influence of the Far Realm. One of the more spectacular forms of grell alchemy produces a streak of lightning that creates a blinding flash where it hits. This is one of the first experiments a grell completes when becoming a philosopher, and it serves as both a sign of station and a means of defense.

As the creature bore down, our drow companion used the magic of his kind to fill the tunnel with darkness. We couldn't see in. We heard snapping and crunching. The beast emerged from the cloud, the entrails of our ally trailing from its beak. Only then did we see the monster up close. Only then did we see it had no eyes.

-Ella Laird, former explorer

Grell **Level 7 Elite Soldier**
Medium aberrant magical beast (blind) XP 600

HP 156; **Bloodied** 78 **Initiative** +9
AC 22, **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 17 **Perception** +9
Speed 1 (clumsy), fly 6 (hover) Blindsight 12
Immune blinded, gaze
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

Human Shield
The grell gains a +2 bonus to AC while it has an enemy grabbed.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Tentacle Rake** (poison) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage, and the target is slowed and takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both).

Tentacle Grab ✦ **At-Will**
Requirement: The grell must not be grabbing a creature.
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +10 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 2d8 + 6 damage, and the grell grabs the target (escape DC 16).

Double Attack ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The grell uses *tentacle grab* and *tentacle rake*, or uses *tentacle rake* twice.

Minor Actions

Venomous Bite (poison) ✦ **At-Will** (1/round)
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature grabbed by the grell); +12 vs. AC
Hit: 1d8 + 4 damage, and the target is stunned (save ends). The stun also ends if the grell is no longer grabbing the target.

Skills Stealth +17

Str 12 (+4)	**Dex** 19 (+7)	**Wis** 12 (+4)
Con 14 (+5)	**Int** 10 (+3)	**Cha** 9 (+2)

Alignment evil **Languages** Deep Speech

Grell Philosopher	**Level 11 Elite Controller**
Medium aberrant magical beast (blind)	XP 1,200
HP 224; **Bloodied** 112	**Initiative** +10
AC 25, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 23	**Perception** +12
Speed 1 (clumsy), fly 6 (hover)	Blindsight 12
Immune blinded, gaze; **Resist** 20 lightning	
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1	
Standard Actions	
Tentacle Rake (poison) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +16 vs. AC	
Hit: 3d8 + 6 damage, and the target is slowed and takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both).	
Lightning Lance (lightning) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +14 vs. Reflex	
Hit: 2d6 + 3 lightning damage, and the target is blinded (save ends).	
Venomous Mind (psychic) ✦ **At-Will**	
Attack: Close burst 3 (enemies in the burst); +14 vs. Will	
Hit: 2d8 + 5 psychic damage, and when the target makes a melee attack, it must choose its target at random from all potential targets in range (save ends).	
Psychic Storm (psychic, zone) ✦ **Recharge** ⚅	
Attack: Area burst 2 within 10 (creatures in the burst); +14 vs. Will	
Hit: 3d8 + 3 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).	
Effect: The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of the encounter. Any creature that ends its turn in the zone is dazed until the end of its next turn.	
Skills Arcana +13, Stealth +20	
Str 14 (+7) **Dex** 21 (+10) **Wis** 14 (+7)	
Con 16 (+8) **Int** 16 (+8) **Cha** 13 (+6)	
Alignment evil **Languages** Deep Speech	

About the Author

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